

THE **7** SACRED **PATHWAYS** → TO INTIMACY

How did a narcissistic husband and a depressed wife create a beautiful marriage?



Benji & Alanna Alexander

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INTRODUCTION & OUR LOVE STORY

INTRO...

Hi – it's so good to connect with you and to be able to share in this priceless conversation around how to create the type of intimacy and romance in marriage that you personally are dreaming of.

Our dream is that this book will help you to create the mind-blowing intimacy that God designed you for.

We are Benji and Alanna Alexander and we believe that one of the most precious treasures in life for us all is experiencing the joy of deep, rich, authentic and passionate intimacy.

We thought a great way to start this journey together would be to get vulnerable and share our love story.

There's going to be a lot of transparency from us in this conversation. We have experienced the pain of a dysfunctional marriage for too many years, and we know too many people walking through heart breaking disconnection, not to fully open our hearts and our lives to you and share some real pain, some real victories and some real wisdom that has changed everything for us.

Here's our love story...

ALANNA'S BACK STORY

I was raised in a loving Christian family with a strong Dutch Reformed heritage. We had a really close immediate family and wider family growing up, and I was pretty sheltered and protected throughout my childhood.

When it came to boys and relationships, I had seen all sorts happening around me at school, but I never got involved seriously with any romantic relationships. I had great Christian friends who shared my views and we supported each other through school.

I stayed away from drugs and alcohol and started getting seriously involved in ministry, leadership and service from the time I was 16.

A number of guys had tried to pursue me but I wasn't particularly interested in any of them. I turned them all down. I had a high value for purity (and perhaps fear of how my parents would respond if they found things out).

I first met Benji when I was 12 years old. I was friends with his younger sister and one day our friends and Benji's friends, who were 16-year-olds, were all at Benji's parents' house at the same time. The boys were being annoying and Benji ended up putting fries and tomato sauce in my pockets and tipping a jug of water over my head. What a lovely first encounter.

Years went by and we didn't really see each other until Benji started to come and help out at a Christian Camp where I was working. We ended up running activities and camps together and I joined one of the mission teams that Benji was leading to Thailand.

During my time at the Christian Camp we actually went through a very devastating season where two of the key people at the camp died of sickness. The leadership structures changed. The demand on everyone went up dramatically. and during this time as I worked myself to exhaustion.

I experienced a complete burn out on all fronts. It took me a long time to have a 'label' for it but I now would call it spiritual abuse, where those in leadership, and my colleagues, used their power over me in a negative way and had the Bible to reinforce their perspectives; which obviously left me pretty crushed as a previously passionate and enthusiastic young woman!

I really felt God calling me to Te Anau, a small town about as far away from home as I could move, to get away from things and have the space I needed to recover, and also to be out of my parents' household and the certain expectations placed on me. I was just planning to take a break for a year and then carry on with my life.

So, I moved to Te Anau not expecting in the least what was about to happen...

BENJI'S BACK STORY

I was born in the jungle in Indonesia where my parents were missionaries with World Vision for 8 years. They returned to New Zealand when I was 2 and became pastors as well as running an organic market gardening business.

At school I had three amazing friends and together the four of us had an absolute blast. We were having so much fun that girls weren't actually that important on my radar. I started getting into alcohol occasionally at 14. We would drink together with the boys pretty regularly and we went to a bunch of parties. I never had any serious girlfriends.

I kissed a German girl on a 10-day sailing adventure and I kissed some other random girls when I was drunk at the Whangamata surf club at a new year's eve party. After that party, I began to shift from just believing in Jesus to following Him.

I had various crushes on girls in the years to come, but I only seriously acted on one before Alanna and I got together. She was a wonderful young lady. I had prayed and fasted and really gone after God to confirm that this girl was the one because I didn't want to stuff things up. I wanted to do it right.

We were together for a while, she knew I was 100% keen to marry her. She wasn't really sure. Some days it looked really positive. Other days it didn't seem like it was going anywhere. On the physical side, we kept strict boundaries. We never did any more than hold hands, hug and few kisses on the cheek.

It took probably around 18 months before I realised if it's not a strong "yes" from her, it has to be a "no".

So, we ended the relationship. I left it with a rejection wound, but mostly I left with a strong decision that I was not ever interested in another relationship unless it was 100% mutual.

It was right after this relationship ended that I moved to Te Anau to be a part of the church plant project.

OUR LOVE STORY

ALANNA

I actually prayed once “God please don’t let me ever marry anyone like Benji.” I think God laughed in that moment... and answered my prayer too. No 'likes' here, only the real deal!

Mainly because my family is so conservative and Benji is so wild he is off the other end of the scale! I call him my Mowgli, as in “The Jungle Book”, because he is wild and he was born in the jungle.

I knew Alanna was not in the least bit interested in me. That was totally ok with me. I really enjoyed her friendship and I wasn’t interested in her either.

A major problem came for me, however, when I started developing a crush on Alanna. A crush that I did not want at all. This crush was the worst type of crush I could have. I had just made a huge personal decision to never pursue anyone unless it was 100% mutual.

On top of that – I was a pastor and she was a member of the church? I didn’t know how that was supposed to work? Stalking the flock? I was doing mental gymnastics hoping this crush would go away.

But it didn’t. I started losing sleep over it. I realised I would have to talk to her about it. We were living in a small town surrounded by stunning mountains in one of the most beautiful places in the world. There wasn’t much to do apart from enjoy the outdoors and that was a spectacular option.

When I went adventuring I usually took a rifle to hunt deer, so I asked Alanna if she wanted to come for a hunt with me. It was a pretty normal thing to do in our part of the world. We went for a walk, we got up in the snow and the mountains were spectacular.

The whole time I knew I needed to talk to her sooner or later.

My expectation was that she was going to turn me down. I was pretty close to 100% confident of that outcome. The main benefit for me of the awkward conversation ahead was that after she had said no, at least I would be able to start getting some sleep.

At the end of the track where we had parked the 4-wheel drive was a bush hut. We cooked up a steak dinner in the little hut – the steak was terrible! The worst steak of our lives. We couldn't finish it. Dinner was over too soon and I knew I couldn't delay any longer I had to start this conversation.

“Alanna, how would you feel if I was to pursue you romantically?”

ALANNA

"I'm really not interested in a relationship with you, Benji."

In my head I thought to myself. Well, that went exactly according to plan. Mission accomplished, time to go home and lick my wounds and start healing. At least I can get some sleep.

Then in that moment, the Holy Spirit said to me, "Ask her, 'What are the main reasons why you wouldn't want a relationship with me.'"

I was thinking, fair enough, that's a good question. At least I could hopefully get a little bit of constructive feedback after my humiliation.

So I asked her not expecting in the least what was about to happen...

ALANNA

That began a conversation that went for hours. I don't even remember most of what we talked about, but I listed all the reasons why I wasn't interested. As we talked about them, something amazing happened. For both of us it was like the veils came off of our eyes and we saw each other like we had never seen each other before.

In that moment, both of us knew with complete certainty that we were going to get married. We talked about it openly and we were in 100% agreement.

The atmosphere in that little bush hut was unbelievable. In all of the worship and prayer events and conferences and schools and missions and outreaches that we've done, I don't think I've ever experienced the atmosphere of Heaven like that before or after. It was so tangible for both of us.

Not only were we certain that we were getting married – we were ridiculously love drunk! Our heads were spinning! Our hearts were racing! We were as deep in love as you can get! I think I got less sleep than before. Just lying on my bed, spinning with absolute euphoric wonder...

The next day we secretly talked about a wedding date, the 29th of May, and I covertly booked the church. We waited 6 months to get engaged, mainly for everyone else's sake. Our engagement was 10 weeks long and we got married on the date we agreed on just hours after we had gotten together – the 29th of May 2010.

ALANNA

We created clear boundaries as we wanted to make sure that our boundaries and our example were above reproach.

Kissing from the neck up was ok. There was to be no touching of breasts, butts or the penis or vagina. We didn't break those boundaries at all. We made ourselves accountable to our senior pastors.

We started doing communication training together. We got some great pre-marital content on what to expect for the wedding night, how to prepare for a whole new world of actually having a sex life. We both married as virgins, so we had no idea what to expect.

We tried to do everything right and we did everything that we knew to prepare for this exciting new world of marriage!

INTRO CONTINUED...

This book and “The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy” training that accompanies it are designed as a blueprint that you can use on your own journey towards mind-blowing, heart blazing romance and intimacy.

(P.S. for all the extra saucy details, Q and A, and way more context – don’t miss The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy Video Training: www.raisingroyalty.com/7-sacred-pathways)

Wherever you are on the relationship journey - single, dating, engaged, married, separated or divorced – it is possible for you to step into your wildest dreams of intimacy and romance.

Regardless of where you are, where you have been or even what you believe is possible – there is a secret that will enable anyone to create a world of intimacy more wonderful than most people have ever imagined.

However, there is also a price that must be paid in full for authentic intimacy. Nasty, fake, shallow, throw away relationships that are here one day and gone the next are cheap and easy. But those who are seduced by cheap and easy are never truly satisfied by the counterfeit of authentic intimacy.

Anyone that truly desires to create a life of deep, authentic, passionate romance and intimacy in marriage can do so.

Whether you're single, dating, engaged, married, separated, divorced or anywhere in between on the relationship spectrum it is absolutely possible to overcome every excuse, every justification, every barrier, every failure, every heartache, every problem, every fear, every fact and every disappointment to create a marriage of passionate romance and priceless intimacy!

That's the good news.

BUT there's a but...

It's not cheap and it's not easy.

Remaining single, remaining in a dysfunctional marriage, remaining in survival mode, remaining in average, bouncing from one night stand to one night stand or from one shallow relationship to another – that's cheap and easy.

Well initially at least – the high price for cheap and easy always comes after the compromise, when regret floods in and you realise that all you can get for cheap and easy is a counterfeit intimacy that takes more than it gives and ultimately leaves you lonely and unknown.

An exquisite marriage of extravagance, romance, unbridled intimacy and a lit-up love life is like the pearl of great price.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

MATTHEW 13:45-46 NKJV

What are you shopping for in a marriage?

Cheap and easy or a pearl of great price? Money can't buy a phenomenal marriage where each person's needs, desires and wildest dreams are abundantly satisfied. This type of relationship can only be purchased with an exclusive currency.

Here's how to tell if you can only afford cheap and easy or if you can afford a marriage that is a pearl of great price.

What are you willing to pay?

The average married person is not willing to pay for anything more than cheap and easy. That's right – I'm calling out the standard of the average marriage as a cheap and easy counterfeit of the true intimacy and romance that we were designed for.

That's the real reason for the skyrocketing divorce rates.

We live in a culture where it is rare to find people who are willing to pay the high price for the type of marriage that would satisfy their wildest dreams and most extravagant desires.

The price for a phenomenal marriage is high and there are no sales, no bargains, no negotiations and there's no compromise. Either we pay the price for an exceptional marriage or we settle for cheap and easy.

This is a moment of extreme ownership.

A moment where you have to wrestle with the authentic desires of your own heart. Do you really want the type of marriage that satisfies your heart's deepest cravings? Do you really want the pearl of great price? Are you willing to sell everything to get it? Think about the mentality of the merchant who bought the pearl of great price.

The merchant's attitude was not "Oh – that's too expensive, that's too much, I'm not gonna do that, that's too far, that's too extreme, I draw the line here, I can't afford that."

No – that's the attitude of a person who can only afford cheap and easy. The merchant's attitude was "At any cost. I will do whatever it takes to possess that prize."

Guess what? That attitude is what got the merchant the pearl of great price. That's the attitude that will take you from where you are now into the fruition of your most intimate and romantic longings and desires.

Your attitude determines what type of relationship you can afford.

Anything less than an attitude that says: "I will do whatever it takes to create the marriage of my dreams", can only afford cheap and easy. Or should I say, cheap and nasty? The culture in our world around relationships is cheap and nasty.

The standard, the average, what most people experience in relationships is cheap and nasty in comparison to the "pearl of great price" relationships that we were designed for.

If that satisfies you...

If you are willing to settle for cheap and nasty...

If you are willing to risk lying on your deathbed and looking back on your life and realising that you never experienced the bliss and the delight of mind-blowing intimacy...

If there is no fight in you, no drive, no desire for the most exceptional, most exquisite, most extravagant romance and intimacy possible then you may not be ready for this training – yet.

We understand that pain can drown your hope for a better and brighter future.

But we aren't saying you have to have hope right now.

The thing that you need the most when it comes to stepping into the dream of your ultimate relationship is desire. The question is – do you want it?

Do you have a desire for a marriage that is spectacular? Do you have a desire for a marriage where both people's most intimate and extravagant wants, needs, dreams and desires are satisfied? Do you have a desire for a marriage that reflects Heaven on Earth?

If you have that desire, even if you don't believe that it's possible - then this training is for you!

But if you have no desire... then it doesn't matter how much money you have – this training is too expensive. It's out of your budget.

Extreme intimacy has a price tag and it's not money.

It's much more expensive than money.

Extreme intimacy can only be purchased with the exclusive currency of vulnerability, humility, courage and work ethic combined together with a mindset that says "I will do whatever it takes to create the marriage of my dreams".

If you're ready to go from wherever you are right now into a world where your greatest aspirations of romance, marriage, intimacy and a blazing hot love life blow your mind – then welcome to a training that will redefine life as you know it.

...and get ready to start paying the price for your wildest dreams.

Chapter 1

A Royal Mess

How did A narcissistic husband and A depressed wife create A beautiful marriage?

WARNING:

This story is an emotional roller coaster - like a Shakespearean tragedy smooshed awkwardly together with a Disney ending.

This story is for anyone: single, dating, engaged, married, separated or divorced who, despite all the challenges, pain and pressure is still courageous enough to dream for mind-blowing intimacy...

We both wondered if our marriage could last..?

At this point in our story I, Benji, was a friendly narcissist and Alanna was happily depressed.

What am I saying?

I loved Alanna, but secretly I blamed her for our tragic love life – assuming that I couldn't possibly be the real issue...

I was always keen for sex. She was the one with the made up excuses and the bad attitudes.

My narcissism enabled me to avoid taking any ownership for my own mess and pile the false judgements all on Alanna. (a nasty recipe for disaster right???).

Alanna was normally a vibrant young lady.

In hindsight, we realise at this point of our story she was suffering post-natal depression, which was thinly veiled by a determination to survive and to meet the needs of 3 young children and an over excited husband.

With our chaos combined we created a marriage where no one's needs were being met.

A marriage of fake agreements, of countless tears, countless dead-end conversations, countless nights and days of heart crushing fear and stress not knowing how we could survive this pressure much longer?

For many, marriage hasn't lasted.

I can't even imagine what that is like.

The heartbreak.

I simply can't even imagine it. I feel enormous empathy for anyone who has walked through this horror that is claiming so many marriages.

I know a lot of my friends have walked through separation and divorce.

We haven't walked that road, but we have been in a place of terrifying and all-consuming pain caused by the fear that all the pressure we were facing in our marriage might eventually be too much?

In the beginning I naively thought that if you loved God, you knew about the 5 Love Languages and you had been through some of Danny Silk and Mark Gungor's training on relationships - your marriage was pretty much bullet proof.

But the excruciating emotional pain I was feeling suggested that really wasn't enough...

I don't know many feelings that are worse than the feeling I experienced when I was completely failing to connect with my own wife.

There were days that felt totally overwhelming and I didn't feel very hopeful at all about our marriage.

Now, I make a distinction between "feelings" and "truth".

The truth was there was hope.

The truth was there were solutions that we had not yet discovered and that the best was yet to come in our marriage. (Some people need to hear that word!)

But that's not at all how we felt.

It would take a lot of transformation for both of us to bring our feelings into alignment with the idea of hope for a better, brighter future. You see, pain has an amazing ability to drown hope.

Through the years of fighting for connection and fighting through my own toxic thinking God led me to a place where I discovered the power of:

"The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy".

Now this wasn't a magic bullet, but it did help us to understand why there was so much pressure on our marriage and, coupled with one other secret, it gave us exactly what we needed to redesign our marriage.

Understanding "The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy" will give you context on our journey and possibly yours too. This insight has been priceless for our marriage...

“THE 7 SACRED PATHWAYS TO INTIMACY”

The Foundational Pathways: Sacred Pathways Numbers 1-3

These three Sacred Pathways are the foundational pathways that determine a person's ability to receive and to express love. They determine our ability to know someone intimately and to be intimately known on a level deeper than just physical intimacy.

We will deep-dive into these pathways in the chapters to come, but here's a quick intro.

Sacred Pathway Number 1

The Spiritual Pathway

This Sacred Pathway determines our capacity to receive and to express love.

Sacred Pathway Number 2

The Emotional Pathway

This Sacred Pathway determines our ability to communicate love.

Sacred Pathway Number 3

The Intellectual Pathway

This Sacred Pathway determines our ability to love our spouse effectively as the individual that they are in the way that they feel most loved.

All by itself is the Forgotten Pathway: Sacred Pathway Number 4.

Sacred Pathway Number 4

The Sensual Pathway

I call this Sacred Pathway “The Forgotten Pathway”, because some of us don’t even realise it exists and that it could be one of the most essential ingredients for a healthy, steamy, lit up love life. It’s the realm of non-sexual physical touch. Snuggling, massage, kisses, hugs, foot rubs and holding hands etc.

The “Make it or Break it” Pathways, Numbers 5-7

I call these 3 Sacred Pathways the “Make It or Break It” pathways, because this is where our problems most often show up in a spectacular, deal breaking fashion. These are the 3 areas where couples experience the most tension and the most common disagreements that end marriages.

Sacred Pathway Number 5

The Financial Pathway

This Sacred Pathway determines your relationship with and your culture around money. How you make money, how you spend, save, invest and give your money. Your culture around money determines whether or not money is the servant or the master of your marriage.

Sacred Pathway Number 6

The Leadership Pathway

This Sacred Pathway determines your culture around decision making and leadership. It not only determines what you do, but how you do it. For example, who decides where you live? Who decides on your vision as a couple? Who decides how you are going to journey into your dreams together? How do you make your decisions as a couple?

Sacred Pathway Number 7

The Sexual Pathway

This Sacred Pathway determines how sex and sexual activities are stewarded in your marriage. Is it a celebration? Is it wildly exciting and passionate? Is it a tool for control? Is it happening? Is it weaponised? Is it mutual? Is it painful? Is it fun? Does it build intimacy or does it drive you apart?

OK, so back to our story...

When we first got married, Alanna was recovering from major burn out and spiritual abuse. This impacted her body, soul and spirit. She was in a very serious recovery mode.

ALANNA:

I don't think either of us understood the impact this had on everything! When you're just trying to survive and get through a day it is impossible to meet anyone else's needs.

Personally, I, Benji, was at the other end of the spectrum in full-on on revival mode and none of my ninja revivalist moves were getting the quick fix for her that I was praying for. She needed time.

This was pressure point 1. Spiritual and emotional

I was still dealing with a rejection mindset, which meant anytime I didn't get the loving I was after, I triggered in one way or another. Usually by sulking, which, by the way has to be one of the greatest turn-offs ever invented. My sulking was me trying to manipulate Alanna into sex.

It was evidence of my victim mindset. It was evidence of deeper issues at hand. Like my refusal to take ownership of how my bad attitude was creating a crapmosphere in our bedroom.

It was evidence that I was more focused on trying to control Alanna's behaviour than I was on taking extreme ownership for my own mess. Interestingly sulking never leads to great sex - if any at all...

Me triggering off my rejection issues and creating a negative atmosphere in the bedroom was pressure point 2. Emotional and Sexual.

I was so busy triggering off my own rejection issues, that I totally missed and totally neglected Alanna's need for sensual touch. Please hear me on this one, team, especially all my men out there...

I hadn't made the distinction between sensual touch and sexual touch and I perceived all touch as being sexual. This led to me totally misreading Alanna's sensual touch and getting turned on like a stallion, when she just wanted a hug.

This led to her reducing her sensual touch, which led to me triggering even more... Yip I got my victim on and I whined, "You never touch me!" So, she'd touch me, just wanting sensual touch – then boom!

Out came the stallion.

She would roll her eyes – I'd get nothing except a generous portion of disappointment... Vicious Cycle, right?

ALANNA

Benji not understanding this meant that no touch was safe. So, all he wanted was touch and I did everything to avoid it.

Me having no clue at all about sensual touch sparked pressure point 3. Sensual, Sexual and Emotional

(Hey by the way, how hot is this, the other night I gave Alanna a full body massage and then – we went straight to sleep.)

When we first got married, I was a full-time volunteer pastor. I had some financial assistance, but we had next to no cash and we had living costs beyond our means. We lived real tight, but even real tight living can't compensate for having next to no income. We also had credit card debt to supplement the shortfall, but we had no idea how we would pay for it.

This produced pressure point number 4. Financial and emotional

We were living a long way from our family, 2-3 days drive away, including an expensive ferry trip or a 2-hour drive, 2-hour flight and a 1-hour drive. For Alanna this was especially hard, even more so when we started having babies and little kids running around.

I absolutely loved everything about where we were and was well used to living away from my family. But Alanna genuinely missed her family and her support network, especially her mum and sister.

It was hard seeing that, and I was happy to move for her if she wanted that. But she knew God had called us to be where we were at that time and said no, we won't move until God speaks. (She waited patiently for God to speak on that for nearly 10 years – what an absolute legend!)

ALANNA

HALLELUJAH!!!! It finally happened! I actually didn't realise how much stress it was causing me until we made the decision to leave. A huge weight lifted off me.

This was pressure point number 5. Leadership

At the time I was totally blind to nearly all these pressure points and was wondering why my prayer and fasting wasn't having instant results like I thought it should?

My secret conclusion: Alanna was the problem. She had a bad attitude. She had issues. (What a self-absorbed punk I was aye?)

Being burnt out spiritually, emotionally and physically and getting next to no sleep because kids are wanting to be breast fed all day and night... Living with financial pressure and living away from your support network...

Being married to a needy, narcissistic stallion of a husband with a rejection trigger who is oblivious to your sensual needs and who is not providing very well is not what most wives would call a turn-on.

Despite all this I was completely oblivious to why Alanna wasn't turned on and boiling like a kettle when we jumped in bed...

Couldn't she see that I was obviously the sexiest man in the whole room? I even checked in the wardrobe. There was no one there, so I definitely was the sexiest man in the room. But most of the time that just wasn't enough...

We have 3 kids though so she had realised at least 3 times just how sexy I was.

Wow - some of her made up excuses as to why she wasn't in the mood for sex were amazing!

That really frustrated me, she was obviously making up bizarre and untrue reasons why tonight wasn't a good night. What I was failing to see was that it was the bigger picture that was the complete turn-off.

This was pressure point number 6. The fusion and chaotic synergy of Spiritual, Emotional, Sensual, Sexual, Leadership and Financial pressure all constantly trying to crush us.

In the midst of this storm – my blindness stopped me from seeing that I was the author of my own chaos. It wasn't the devil making this mess. It wasn't even Alanna's attitude.

It was me. I was the issue. Pride is blind.

We had compounding levels of pressure on 6 of "The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy". That's a recipe for a lot of pain, dysfunction and disconnection. Something that we did have going for us in the midst of all that was – a good level of communication.

We worked hard on communication. It didn't fix everything else, but it was our one redeeming factor and the majority of the time it helped keep us connected on at least one level through most of our painful days.

Let me clarify something: our lives were not a nightmare. We had a deep love for one another and so many good times all the way through... In many ways our lives were an absolute blast! God was moving and so many exciting things were always happening.

But we had skeletons in the closet and the pressure could flare up at any moment.

There were some very dark days.

Days when I was triggering and the pressure felt like it could crush me. I had no idea what to do. I was praying for breakthrough. I was stressing out. My mind at certain times just felt like a dark cloud had descended on me and a swarm of negative thoughts, pain and pressure overwhelmed me.

I was out of tools!

My go-to was not alcohol, drugs, food, porn, adultery or other forms of self-medication. My go-to was prayer, but at the time, even after years, it didn't look like I was getting any breakthrough. It was at this point, when nothing seemed to be working and the pain was so intense and I was so desperate for solutions, that a miracle happened.

The pain paved the way for my miracle.

Pain broke through my narcissism and spoke to me in a way nothing else could. I had a realisation that had never truly occurred to me...

I eventually discovered I was the catalyst of my own chaos and I had my own bad attitudes and mess to deal with. I had a massive mindset shift and shifted from justifying myself to taking extreme ownership for my mess.

I dropped my secret judgements regarding what I thought Alanna was doing wrong. I stopped blaming her for our tragic love life and I took extreme ownership for what I could do to change things.

As soon as this happened – the pressure began to ease in our marriage. Things didn't happen instantly. Bummer aye! Making changes like this seem excruciatingly difficult and I wanted instant results. But relationships don't work like that.

Trust has to be rebuilt and that takes time. Don't think a week of good behaviour is all it takes. Don't be surprised yourself if your spouse is surprised or even suspicious at first when you make big changes like this. I went all in on changing me.

I took extreme ownership for my triggering and the nasty atmosphere I created every time I sulked. I banished that sucker from the bedroom. I took ownership for Alanna's need for sensual touch. Together we faced up to our fake agreements and stopped breaking promises to each other.

By starting to take extreme ownership regarding what I could personally control relating to "The 7 Sacred Pathways to Intimacy" – everything started changing.

Little by little, what was just a glimmer of hope blossomed to become a brand new day and that brand new day has become a brave new world of intimacy and delight in our marriage that we would once have struggled to imagine!

Alanna's attitude and made-up excuses weren't the only issue here. In fact – they might not be the real issue at all. What if they were symptoms of a deeper problem and I was the root cause?

That hope did not just come from discovering the existence of “The 7 Sacred Pathways to Intimacy”, but from uncovering another powerful secret that was the key to implementing “The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy” in our lives to redesign our marriage.

If you imagine that “The 7 Sacred Pathways to Intimacy” are like a vehicle that has the ability to take you into a world of mind-blowing intimacy then there's one more secret that is the fuel that will help any couple take this vehicle wherever they want it to go!

This book and “The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy” training series (www.raisingroyalty.com/7-sacred-pathways) is designed to help you master the keys to unlocking the intimacy, the romance and the marriage of your dreams.

We're excited to have you on this journey with us and we are looking forward to all that God is going to do along the way.

Let us be completely transparent. Our marriage is the best it's ever been, but we are constantly working on it. Maintaining a fantastic relationship requires intentionality.

No matter how good a relationship is – life always has storms that it throws at you. Whether it's parenting, health, business or major life events, there's always something to navigate together.

We have moments that we are exceptionally proud of and moments that we aren't, but we keep dreaming and keep building every day towards those dreams.

We invite you to join us on this beautiful journey of bringing our greatest desires for intimacy, connection, romance and love to fruition during “The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy” adventure.

²⁶ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

MATTHEW 19:26 NIV

Chapter 2

What Do You Want?

WHAT'S YOUR DREAM?

You can see already from the intro that relationships are complicated, but we are guessing you already knew that.

All of the “7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy” are connected and there is a dynamic interplay and tension between them all. If we fail to master the balance, they have the ability to produce extreme chaos and pain in our lives, but if we master them, they have the ability to bring our wildest dreams of romance and intimacy to life.

In our journey there's been pain, there's been disappointments, confusion, tension, misunderstandings, broken promises and so many failures. However there's something that eclipses all of the challenges and that is the dream.

The dream that brought us together in the beginning. A life shared together. A life of joyful intimacy and adventures, of family, of dreams fulfilled, of companionship, romance and legacy as we dance through life bringing Heaven to Earth!

Everyone will have their own picture of what their dream marriage looks like for them. It is essential that any couple or individual holds this dream at the forefront of their attention. Wherever you are on the relationship spectrum you need to think about, speak about and write down what you want.

What is your picture, your dream and your definition of the most amazing intimacy possible? The strength of a relationship comes from the vision that a couple has for their relationship and the price they are willing to pay to live that dream.

That vision has to start with you. Not with your spouse. With you. This is your moment to take extreme ownership for your relationship. You are a powerful person and now is your moment to step up and take ownership for your dream.

It's your responsibility alone to create your own vision for what you truly desire from the most amazing marriage possible. It's then your responsibility to honestly and effectively communicate that vision with your spouse. As a couple it's your responsibility to fuse your two dreams into one harmonious masterpiece that you are going to devote the rest of your lives to creating and enjoying together.

Whether you are single or in a relationship there are commitments that you must keep every single day if you want to step into your greatest dreams and most personal desires of extravagant, sizzling hot romance and intimate companionship.

It is your value, your desire, your hunger for the exceptional marriage that you are dreaming of that will give you the inspiration, the courage and the willpower to do whatever it takes on a daily basis to bring that dream to life.

So, let us ask you? What's the dream for your marriage? What does the best case scenario for your marriage look like? Whether you are married now or not – what's the dream?

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."

PROVERBS 29:18 KJV

Chapter 3

We Do Hard Things!

What's the secret to getting whatever you want in life?

A friend of mine, David Riddell, often starts his speaking engagements by asking people if they want to know the secret to getting whatever they want in life?

Would you want to know that secret?

This secret is one of the most important principles for bringing dreams to life. David's audience is always engaged and on the edge of their seats as he teases them a little bit to see if they really want to know his secret.

Here's his answer:

"The secret to getting whatever you want in life is to do whatever it takes to get it."

DAVID RIDDELL

People hear it, but few people ever implement it and there's a reason for that.

Few people do whatever it takes to get whatever they want because they don't have what it takes to do whatever it takes. Let me say that again, most people don't have what it takes, to do whatever it takes.

Most people give up too soon or they don't push hard enough or they don't find a way. Most people get stuck. Most people get knocked out of the game. For one reason or another things get too hard and most people give up while others are obviously succeeding.

So the deeper question becomes – how do you get what it takes to do whatever it takes so that you can get whatever you want?

Now that's a penetrating question with a meaty answer.

The reason people can't do whatever it takes is because they lack will power.

You could call this self-control, will power, work ethic, grit – it's all the same.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.”

2 TIMOTHY 1:7 BSB

Will power or self-control is the inner strength and tenacity that fuels a person to do whatever it takes to get whatever they want.

You could look at will power from another angle too - will power is your personal sovereignty. Your free will. Your power to choose.

Your sovereignty, free will, self-control or will power is one of the greatest assets that God has given you. For a person with strong will power – nothing is impossible. For a person with weak will power – nothing is possible.

If there was only one thing that you could focus on in life I would recommend by far, focusing on developing will power, because once you have developed strong will power you will have the ability to transform any area of your life that you want to.

A great example of will power is Thomas Edison. Edison, as you probably know, was a prolific inventor from the 1800's. One of his most well-known inventions is the light bulb. That's what most people think anyway. He didn't actually invent the light bulb. Light bulbs have existed in various forms for centuries. What he invented was the first commercially viable lightbulb that you could have in your house.

In order to find a way to create a bulb suitable for household use, Edison had to test over 6,000 different materials to get the filament in the lightbulb to glow without instantly burning up.

"The electric light has caused me the greatest amount of study and has required the most elaborate experiments," he wrote. "I was never myself discouraged, or inclined to be hopeless of success. I cannot say the same for all my associates."

THOMAS A. EDISON

He had people sending him materials from all over the world to test for this purpose and he failed every single time - at least 6,000 times in a row.

But he had the will power to keep going! Would you give up after failing 3,000 times in a row? How many times would you be willing to try a new approach to creating the most exhilarating intimacy and romance possible in your life?

10 times?

100 times?

1,000 times?

At least 6,000 attempts in a row were all failures for Edison. Then finally he ran an experiment that worked and in January 1879 Thomas A. Edison had a working, commercially viable household lightbulb!

"Before I got through," he recalled, "I tested no fewer than 6,000 vegetable growths, and ransacked the world for the most suitable filament material."

THOMAS A. EDISON

The lightbulb is a great invention, but what fascinates me even more is Edison's will power. His ability to never give up. Where did this come from?

As a child, Edison's mother encouraged him in his obvious passion for science. She let him set up a laboratory in their basement. He focused diligently on studying his passions of chemistry and electronics. During this time he invested himself into doing countless experiments.

With every book he read and every experiment that he conducted and every hour that he laboured – he was building the will power that he would one day need to fail 6,000 times in a row without losing hope.

It was Thomas's mum that encouraged him the most in his early years to wholeheartedly pursue his passions.

"My mother was the making of me. She understood me; she let me follow my bent."

THOMAS A. EDISON

There was one other secret that Thomas understood thoroughly that was even more important than all his intellect. This is an extremely profound statement...

“Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.”

THOMAS A. EDISON

This above anything else is the key to Edison's success. It's what set him apart far more than his intelligence levels. He understood that the secret to getting whatever you want in life is to do whatever it takes.

He also understood that the process of developing what it takes, to be able to do whatever it takes, in order to get whatever you want, all revolves around on thing:

Doing hard things!

It is the practice of doing hard things repetitively that develops in us the mental fortitude, the self-control, the grit or the will power that we need to have the strength to never give up! And that strength in a marriage is indispensable.

Choose Your Hard...

Life doesn't give you the option to avoid hard things. Our culture does its best to avoid pain and to avoid hard things – but in reality it is not possible to avoid hard things.

The menu that life presents you with is: would you like you hard things now or would like them later? You can choose to embrace a diet of hard things right now or you can avoid hard things right now and then life will hold you down and force feed you hard things later on.

Hard things can only be avoided for a short period of time – then they come crashing in on you with a vengeance!

Les Brown, one of the most famous motivational speakers in the world, says:

“Do what is easy and your life will be hard. Do what is hard and your life will become easy.”

A delayed consequence is always a much higher price to pay than delayed gratitude.

Let's explore the menu of hard things that life offers us:

Being single is hard. Dating is hard. Being engaged is hard. Being married is hard. Being separated is hard. Being divorced is hard. Having an average dysfunctional marriage is hard. Having the most phenomenal, mind-blowing, exhilarating, passionately romantic and deeply intimate marriage imaginable is hard.

Life does not offer you a hard menu and an easy menu. Life offers you a menu of hard things and says: “Choose your hard.”

Do you want to do the hard things that produce the marriage of your dreams? Or, do you want to avoid doing the hard things that will set you and your marriage up for success and deal with the hard things that come from an average dysfunctional marriage?

Do you want to deal with the hard things that come from divorce?

Do you want to deal with the hard things that come from being single?

Everyone who hears this is going to be in a different place on their relationship journey. Everyone will be facing a different set of hard things.

My aim is not to bring condemnation to anyone for wherever you are right now. In fact my heart is full of empathy for people who are in a difficult place relationally. My aim is to point out that life doesn't offer any of us an easy path. We must all choose our hard (things)?.

What I am aiming to do is to encourage you to embrace hard things now, so that, as Les Brown says, your future can be easy, as you reap the rewards of investing into hard grind right now.

Let's take a moment to think about the menu that life is offering us and see what interests you?

Being single is hard. Being married is hard. Having an on-fire love life is hard. Having an average marriage is hard. Being divorced is hard. Everything in between is hard. Which would you prefer?

Obesity is hard. Being a bit overweight is hard. Being fit is hard. Being a successful athlete is hard. Which would you prefer?

Being poor is hard. Being under financial pressure is hard. Being bankrupt is hard. Being financially stable is hard. Developing healthy financial mindsets is hard. Developing multiple streams of income is hard. Which would you prefer?

Living with self-destructive mindsets is hard. Personal development is hard. Which would you prefer?

Living disconnected from God is hard. Living with a love deficit is hard. Learning how to pray is hard. Maintaining spiritual disciplines is hard. Renewing your mind is hard. Discovering your identity and breaking free from lies is hard. Learning how to live in oneness with God and effortless bliss is hard. Which would you prefer?

Is there anywhere in your life that your choices are betraying your preferences?

Do you want the best of the best when it comes to your marriage, your health, your finances, your mindsets and your walk with God?

Do you betray your dreams by choosing the easy path in life that you know will lead to delayed consequences?

Are you embracing hard things daily and building up your will power as you invest into your wildest dreams?

Every time you choose to do something hard 2 things happen:

The first thing is you build will power just like you build muscle from lifting weights. I believe that this truly is the most influential and life changing asset that you can invest into – developing will power. The second thing that happens is that you add momentum into the area of your life where you are investing yourself into.

WE DO HARD THINGS!

If I look at our marriage and the pressure that we went through – at times it felt close to breaking point. We didn't want that. We wanted a happy marriage. But there was just so much mess in ourselves, in our marriage, in our finances, in our identity, in our emotions, in our life choices, in the bedroom – everywhere we turned, there was mess and hard things.

Fortunately, we both grew up doing hard things. I grew up on an organic market garden. It was a 12-acre farm, which isn't a huge farm, but when it comes to weeding by hand, planting by hand, fertilising by hand, harvesting by hand it's an insane amount of work.

ALANNA

Benji's dad had a knack for roping anyone who visited the farm into weeding etc too!

It was an infinite job list.

Regardless of the weather. If it was a thunderstorm, the job still had to be done. If it was the middle of summer, the job still had to be done. If it was early morning and frosty – the job still had to be done. If it was late at night and you'd already worked 13 hours – the job still had to be done.

I was raised on a diet of hard things.

As I reflected on this after over a decade of working with people in the areas of vision, identity and personal transformation I came to a fascinating realisation about my own childhood.

So many of the people that I worked with struggled with the process of personal transformation. They struggled in the area of personal vision. They struggled in the area of identity. I didn't recognise the same level of struggle in myself. As I investigated further I realised that a lot of my peers had these same struggles.

When I explored even further I discovered a treasure in my past that I had never fully appreciated. The relentless diet of hard things growing up had built strong will power in me. It was the missing piece of the puzzle that helped me see why so many people were stuck in the struggle zone.

They lacked self-control. Now if we lack self-control, that makes us easily controlled. Easily controlled by negative feelings. Easily controlled by negative emotions. Easily controlled by circumstances. Easily controlled by spiritual forces.

When we lack self-control we become controlled. Our free will becomes controlled will. We come under immense spiritual bondage. The only way to reclaim our sovereignty, to take back our self-control is by exercising our will power. We have to strengthen our will power like a weightlifter strengthens their muscles.

We strengthen our will power by consciously choosing to do hard things.

The most powerful thing that you can do in your life to position yourself for the most delight filled marriage that you can imagine is to do hard things. Whether you are single, dating, engaged, married, separated or divorced – if you still have the desire in you to experience wild, extravagant, beautiful romance and intimacy, then the most powerful thing that you can do to bring that dream to life is hard things.

How hard should these hard things be?

As hard as possible!

How often should you do these hard things?

As often as possible!

When should you start?

As soon as possible and as young as possible!

When should you stop?

When should you start?

As soon as possible and as young as possible!

When should you stop?

Never!

What are your wildest dreams made of?

Hard things!

For our marriage, hard things was our only option. We hadn't planned to create a dysfunctional marriage. We were taken by surprise. We had no idea about "The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy" and I didn't realise that I was creating my own chaos. I knew the pain was real – but I hadn't understood where it was coming from or how to deal with it.

Once I finally realised that I was the catalyst of my own chaos – there was only one solution...

The price tag for the heart thumping, glorious intimacy that we were created for is hard things every day. If you are willing to commit to a diet of intentional hard things – nothing is impossible!

If you aren't willing to commit to a diet of intentional hard things, then unfortunately, you better get ready for some delayed consequences. Life doesn't offer anyone a free pass on hard things – we either embrace hard things now and reap the reward or we avoid hard things now and then life will hold us down kicking and screaming and force feed us those nasty consequences.

We had to make a decision – was it time for healthy change or did we want more chaos and dysfunction?

There was only one way we were going to be able to turn our marriage around and the answer was: Hard things! A lot of hard things. Hard things every day. But guess what – doing the right hard things will redesign your world.

That's what changed everything for us in our marriage and allowed us to transform our dysfunction into something priceless. It's just like Les Brown says, **"Do what is easy and your life will be hard. Do what is hard and your life will become easy."**

Chapter 4

Sacred Pathway Number 1

The Spiritual Pathway

The Spiritual Pathway determines your personal ability to receive and to express love.

You can't give more love than you are getting without eventually running completely dry. If you want to be an exceptional lover, you need a never-ending source of love that fuels you. Then you can easily love abundantly out of the overflow. By mastering the Spiritual Pathway, you can have a permanent overflow of divine love within yourself, that you can then share with those around you. That's exactly what Jesus was talking about in John 4:14.

“but if anyone drinks the living water I give them, they will never be thirsty again. For when you drink the water I give you, it becomes a gushing fountain of the Holy Spirit, flooding you with endless life!”

JOHN 4:14 TPT

Let me introduce this chapter and the sacred Spiritual Pathway with a story of amazing transformation.

MARINA

At the age of 14 Marina collected a lethal dose of mercury. This day, would be the day that she would die...

She was on her way to finish a job, with the poison in her pocket, that she had already attempted twice before. She was about to drink her lethal supply of mercury and end her life. She had done her research to make sure there was no way that she could fail this time.

On her way to drink the mercury she was interrupted by a girl she knew who invited her to come to church. Marina had never been to church.

She lived in Tajikistan, a Muslim country. Her family was not religious. She had no concept of what God might be like. In her heart, she felt like she was called to more than this. She felt like there was someone calling to her. But she had no idea who or how to respond. In that moment, she had other things on her mind. Specifically – she did not want to attempt suicide again, she wanted to do the job right. This would be the day that she died.

For some reason she said yes to the girl, thinking that she would kill herself after going to church.

She doesn't remember very much of the service that day. What she remembers is that she had a tangible, supernatural encounter with the love of God and experienced a love that she had never known before...

Marina was the oldest of three siblings. Their apartment had one bedroom and one other room for everything else. She had a younger brother and a younger sister.

Her sister was a full sister. Her brother was a half-brother. Her older full sister died as a baby.

Her mum left her biological dad when she was very young. She barely ever saw him.

Her stepdad was not abusive. He was reasonably kind when he was present, but that wasn't often. Between his addiction to alcohol and his regular trips to prison, she only saw him occasionally, before he left for good.

Her mother worked as a prostitute. Her home was a brothel.

Marina tried to look after her younger brother and sister and keep them feeling safe when men were with their mum or other women in the bedroom next to them. It regularly got violent. There were often multiple men in the room. There was fighting and violence on a regular basis.

Marina's mum turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism. She would get very drunk and violent. She beat Marina brutally. Marina still has physical scars from her childhood beatings. But this is not the mother that Marina remembers, the prostitution, the violence and the alcohol drove her to the end of herself and she would sometimes lose control. Marina remembers her for the amazing mother that she was before poverty left her mother with the options of selling her children, as others were doing, or prostitution to provide for them.

Marina longed for the mother that she had always known to come back to them.

When she left home, she was known as the daughter of a prostitute. Marina and her siblings were abused, attacked and mocked.

She had to fight constantly. She had to fight to protect herself. She had to fight to protect her siblings. At home she fought to survive. Out of home she fought to survive.

Everywhere she went there was abuse and chaos.

Her whole life and her whole world was void of love.

In place of love, her world was full of chaos.

Her world of trauma and abuse constantly reinforced to her the lies that she was inadequate, and unworthy of love.

Pain and shame flooded her heart and she had given up. She was ready to drink the mercury and end the relentless pain of this loveless existence.

But that day in church a supernatural, divine love like nothing she had ever experienced or even imagined flooded her heart and launched her on her very first steps of a beautiful transformational journey.

She cancelled her planned suicide. Instead she slowly began to develop a relationship with this God who was the source of this mysterious but wonderful divine love.

This process was a process of discovering that she was made in the image of God and she was as loved as loved can be. This journey of discovering the truth about God and the truth about her identity, sparked a spiritual transformation.

Freedom from the oppressive darkness that had been driving her to suicide flowed into her life.

A divine love that she had never known or imagined before began to fill her heart.

Eventually her mum's body gave up on her. With no money to go to the hospital, they watched her deteriorate before their own eyes. In the final hours they took her to hospital where she died traumatically.

Marina narrowly avoided being raped and trafficked.

Her brother was unjustly put in prison as a teenager.

Traffickers took her sister. Her sister eventually escaped only to be trafficked again and escape again...

Her biological dad also died several years after her mum.

Marina battled poverty, doing everything she could to provide for her family.

Despite the chaos all around her, the hand of God was on Marina and a deep work was taking place inside her.

A truly unexpected adventure with Jesus was about to begin that no one could have imagined!

The struggle is real...

Marina's struggles. Our struggles. Your struggles.

Marina had a lot of "buts" a lot of "excuses" and a lot of "justifications" that could have turned her into a victim for the rest of her life.

She had every reason to become a person who was focused on what she couldn't control instead of focusing on what she could control...

Then she did something extremely rare.

Marina did the most powerful thing that she possibly could have done.

She took extreme ownership of her own life.

She refused to play the blame game, blaming everyone in her life for her problems.

Her mum, her dad, her stepdad, her circumstances, her trauma, her past, her...

She began to focus on any and every tiny thing that she could control: her attitudes, her mindsets, her skillsets, her work ethic, her faith, her health, her relationships, her identity, her assignment, her vision, her systems, her finances...

As she did this, she experienced a powerful spiritual transformation.

She broke off the lies that screamed out that she was defined by her abuse, traumas, circumstances, family and failures.

She renewed her mind.

She embraced what the Word of God declared about her identity – she was made in the image of God!

She laid a brand new spiritual foundation. It took time. It took devotion to Jesus and to the process.

The result was escaping a loveless existence, where she struggled to love herself and others.

She stepped into a world infused with divine love.

She stepped into a world filled with the abundant love of God. Her ability to receive love and to express love, was changed forever.

Her journey of transformation wasn't cheap or easy. It had a high price. But it paid out an exceptional reward!

OPERATING SYSTEMS

In Genesis 1, the very first chapter of the Bible, we discover one of the single most powerful revelations that anyone can ever receive. We were made by God in His image and He did a perfect job.

GENESIS 1:27 NIV

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Nothing will impact your life or your marriage more than the spiritual foundations that you have established in your life, because it is your spiritual foundations that determine your capacity to receive and express love.

Whether you realise it or not, your spiritual foundations define every aspect of your life.

Most people don't realise this because the majority of the time our spiritual foundations operate sub-consciously and unconsciously.

They quietly control our thought patterns, our feelings, our emotions, our desires, our responses, our values and our direction.

Whether we realise it or not our every thought, feeling and action is dictated by the spiritual foundations that we have laid in our lives.

Ultimately our spiritual foundations determine our ability to receive and express love.

Kind of a big deal right? Especially if we want a marriage where both people receive an abundance of everything that they want, when they want it and how they like it!

How loved you feel on a moment-by-moment basis is the fruit of your spiritual foundations.

Let me share some of my spiritual journey with you and how I came to learn about identity, “Operating Systems”, orphan mindsets and Sonship, and how it eventually set us up for great sexcess in our marriage.

When I was young and I read the Bible, I saw that Jesus moved in supernatural power and that in John 14:12 He promised that same power to those who followed Him:

“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these”

I grew up in the church, however I came from a religious church culture and I never saw supernatural power in action.

But I was fascinated by Jesus’s promise and I began to pursue a dream to see the supernatural power of God moving in my life. It actually took 6 years of prayer, fasting and learning before I got free from my religious mindsets that were shutting down the power of God in my life. But once I got a breakthrough into the supernatural – I began to see a flood of supernatural activity.

I started equipping evangelism teams, missions teams, youth groups, camp groups, churches and anyone who wanted to be activated in the supernatural power of God.

We saw God doing so much that I ended up spending several years travelling around New Zealand empowering people for supernatural ministry. As part of the training I took teams out onto the streets and to other nations to demonstrate the love and power of God through supernatural ministry. We saw a lot of miracles and a lot of people had encounters with the love and power of God.

One day, one of the ladies on my team being trained for supernatural ministry received a healing. She had been born deaf in her right ear. I prayed for her for a few seconds and God instantly opened up her deaf ear. I was delighted; she was delighted we were amazed and overwhelmed with joy!

This took place in a food court in the Westfield Shopping Centre on the North Shore of Auckland. She broke down in tears and began creating a bit of a scene. Ladies that were working in the food court clearing tables began to check on her and see if she was ok.

She shared what was happening for her and we prayed for two of the ladies. One lady received a healing in her knee. The other had an encounter with the presence of God.

Following this God led us to the emergency room at the North Shore Hospital. When we went there we found an elderly man with a major hip problem. He had been in pain for years with it, but that day it had become so extreme that he asked his son to bring him into the hospital for immediate attention.

One of the boys on our team (I think he was 11 or 12) prayed for the man and his hip was instantly and completely healed.

He began to talk to us about his wife who had serious back pain. We called her on the son's cell phone and prayed over the phone. She too was instantly healed.

The boy who had prayed over the phone began questioning her and asking her if she was serious.

The lady's son, who was not following Jesus, then took the phone and also questioned her, to find out if she had really just been healed over the phone. She assured us that all the pain was gone. The parents were both Christians and began thanking God.

The team then ministered to the son who gave his life to Jesus right there in the emergency room.

We had the privilege of sharing in hundreds of stories of healings and God encounters. Jesus is soooooo crazy amazing and good!

He turned up all over the world!

We saw the love and power of God move on the streets, on planes, in airports, in hospitals, pubs, churches, unreached villages, kids camps, youth camps, prisons, conferences, hotels, buses, war zones, red light districts, homes, parks, cars, restaurants and mansions. From the jungles of Thailand to the Serengeti - everywhere we went on the planet we saw God move in love and power through our teams.

Alanna and I shared most of these adventures together. However as our family had grown we have split things up, sometimes taking the whole family on missions, sometimes just myself and a couple of times Alanna and I have been able to get the grandparents to look after the kids and gone adventuring around the world together.

We celebrated and loved what God was doing! It was such an honour to partner with God in bringing Heaven to Earth. But over the years I began to become aware of a much more urgent need in our teams than being empowered for supernatural ministry.

In saying what I am about to say I in no way want to diminish the significance of supernatural ministry. God's power makes His love effective and His power touches our hearts in significant ways.

I've seen it in the eyes of the person who was just healed of cancer.

I've seen it in the eyes of the cripple that gets up and walks. I've seen it in the eyes of the deaf person that hears or the lady whose headache just got healed. I've seen it in eyes that were once blind. The power of God is a vital expression of His love that humanity has great need of.

It was during this time that we discovered that if we wanted to empower people for a supernatural lifestyle, which produced both the fruit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, then our focus had to be deeper than activations for supernatural ministry.

Our focus had to be on identity.

One of the most spiritual beliefs that you have is your belief of who you are. What is your identity? What defines you?

Just like Marina – we all go through negative experiences and deep personal struggles.

Satan's goal is to get us to believe lies about who we are through those experiences.

Satan's goal is for every negative experience, word, trauma, abuse, failure, mistake, sin and twisted thing that has ever gone wrong in our lives to falsely define us, to corrupt our image of who we are and to rob us of our true identity as God's beloved children made in His image.

Your beliefs about your identity are some of the most foundational and powerful spiritual beliefs that you have.

Your belief of who you are influences:

All your thoughts.

All your feelings.

All your emotions.

All your behaviour.

All your relationships.

Your entire state of being and definitely your sex life are influenced by your belief of who you are.

Our understanding of our identity directly influences every moment, of every day of our lives. It is this aspect of our spiritual foundation that determines our capacity to receive and express love.

If we have come to the conclusion that we are unworthy of love in any way, we shut down our own ability to receive love from God. Not only that, we sabotage the attempts of others to love us well. We can end up sabotaging our own relationships, because we don't believe we are truly worthy of love.

We don't usually do this consciously.

Most of the time our spiritual beliefs operate subconsciously and unconsciously, just quietly ticking away in the background controlling our entire lives on auto pilot.

Have you ever heard someone say: "I don't know why I did that?" or "I don't know why I reacted like that?"

The reason is that they acted or reacted according to what they believed on a deep subconscious or unconscious level.

If we believe that we are worthy to be perfectly loved we open up like a flower in full bloom and receive love from God and others effortlessly and joyfully.

The influence that our understanding of our identity has on our lives could never be overestimated.

A person's identity is like their operating system. In this world of technology, operating systems are common. Every smartphone, tablet, laptop and desktop computer has an operating system. As do many other devices.

An "Operating System" is the primary program that manages all the hardware and software. It controls every process; all file selection, all memory and all external devices.

Simply put the operating system is the brains of the whole system. If an operating system is damaged or corrupted in some way it has the capacity to either partially or completely shut down a device's ability to function the way it was designed to operate.

A human's operating system is their collection of spiritual beliefs and most importantly their beliefs about their identity.

If our understanding of our identity is damaged or corrupted then our capacity to fulfil our potential and function according to the divine design for our lives will be either partially or completely shut down.

The operating system on a smartphone or any other device interacts with multiple other functions on a device. One commonly used function that operating systems interact with is "Apps" or applications. An App empowers the device to perform another function that it could not do without it.

As you know, you can add all sorts of Apps to a device.

You can get an App on your phone that allows you to control the heating in your house from anywhere in the world. You can get an App on your phone that helps you pay your bills and do your banking. You can get Apps that help you edit photos and make movies.

There are thousands of Apps to choose from.

The human equivalent of an App would be a skill, a talent or an ability of some kind. Apps like cooking skills or computing skills operate in the area of our conscious mind.

We are much more familiar with our conscious mind than we are with our subconscious and unconscious mind.

Our understanding of our identity controls the subconscious and unconscious area of our mind and they directly influence how we express our talents, skills and abilities that are operating out of the conscious area of our mind.

For example, being a professional builder (or any other type of professional) is the equivalent of an App.

Now there are lots of builders with the same building “App” – but what sets all those builders apart? What makes them so unique in their emotions, reactions, behaviours, addictions and values?

What makes them an angry builder, an honest builder, a violent builder, a gentle builder, a happy builder or a depressed builder?

What makes them a builder limited to human reasoning or a builder listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit?

What sets them all apart is their “Operating Systems”.

Their “Operating System” is their spiritual foundation that is operating on a subconscious and unconscious level to determine all their thoughts, emotions, reactions and behaviours all day long.

Living with an accurate understanding of our identity is priceless because it influences every part of our lives every moment of the day. Every time we believe a lie, that lie corrupts our “Operating System”.

Our people on our ministry teams had a greater need than a healing “App” or a prophecy “App”.

Our people, myself included needed a complete overhaul of our identity and “Operating Systems”.

“For if you embrace the truth, it will release true freedom into your lives.”

JOHN 8:32 TPT

I worked with hundreds of people and got to see many people activated for supernatural ministry, or you could say, “download a supernatural ministry App”. However I also saw that because of a flaw in our “Operating Systems”, we were struggling with either sin issues or living under demonic oppression.

I saw people prophesy accurately and impact people’s lives for good, but then go home and live in depression. I saw people get multiple words of knowledge one after the other and see many people healed but afterwards struggle with integrity. I saw people lead many to Jesus, but still live a life bound by fear.

The supernatural ministry “App” was not the problem. The problem was that people’s “Operating Systems” had been corrupted by lies.

The problem was one of the greatest issues that humanity has ever faced. The problem was an identity crises. It's not an issue that just faces people being activated for supernatural ministry. This issue of an identity crises is a global issue, it may very well be the greatest issue that humanity has ever faced.

Humanity has lost sight of the reality that we were created in the image of God and that our true identity is exclusively defined by our Father in Heaven.

This identity crises has given rise to a world filled with spiritual orphans. Instead of "Operating Systems" functioning according to divine design in the ways of Sonship - orphan mindsets have corrupted humanity's "Operating Systems" and this is causing major chaos all over the planet.

A species that was designed as the ultimate vessels of divine love, created to be perfectly loved, to live overwhelmed by divine love and to overflow with divine love has been corrupted by the orphan virus.

Orphan mindsets produce a loveless existence.

I would like to take a moment here to help you understand my definition of the terms Orphan/Orphan Mindset/Spiritual Orphan/Orphan Illusion and Son or Sonship.

First of all the Bible uses the terminology Son or Sonship in a generic non-gender specific way. Just as both men and women are referred to as the Bride of Christ, men and ladies are referred to as the Sons of God. The term Sonship refers to our spiritual identity as those made in the image of God.

I describe mature Sonship as the ability to receive divine love perfectly and the ability to give perfect expression to divine love.

The state of Sonship produces a love overflow.

When it comes to the term orphan, I try to be careful not to label anyone an orphan. The word “orphan” does not accurately describe anyone’s true identity. All humanity was created in the image of God and all of us trace our origins, our genealogy back to the Father of creation who created Adam and Eve in His image.

However, I do use the terms; orphan, orphan mindsets, spiritual orphan, orphan illusion or other derivatives of orphan to describe the state of being that we begin to experience when we become disconnected from the revelation of our true identity.

I describe the orphan state of being as the inability to receive divine love perfectly and the inability to give perfect expression to divine love.

The orphan state of being produces a love deficit.

Watching the fruit of the identity crises produced by orphan mindsets unfold in our ministry over a number of years has caused me to shift my priority from “Apps” to “Operating Systems”.

From supernatural ministry - to Sonship.

I still equip people for supernatural ministry and supernatural ministry is essential in my life, because God’s power demonstrates His love. However, the majority of my focus in making disciples is on upgrading people’s “Operating Systems” and establishing people in their true identity as Sons.

I could not have imagined how much transformation this focus on Sonship would produce in my own life, in our marriage, in our ministry or in the lives of those around us.

There is nothing more empowering for a couple that desires to establish a phenomenal relationship than to discover and live out of the revelation of their God given identity, because it determines our personal ability to receive and express love.

Think of your identity as the tap that turns the love in your life on or off.

Are you living in a supernatural love overflow?

Are you living in a love deficit?

It is all determined by how mature you are in your God-given identity.

Check out Ephesians 3:17-19, this passage describes the state of being that a person begins to live in when they mature in their God-given identity.

¹⁷ “Then, by constantly using your faith, the life of Christ will be released deep inside you, and the resting place of his love will become the very source and root of your life.

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ Then you will be empowered to discover what every holy one experiences—the great magnitude of the astonishing love of Christ in all its dimensions. How deeply intimate and far-reaching is his love! How enduring and inclusive it is! Endless love beyond measurement that transcends our understanding—this extravagant love pours into you until you are filled to overflowing with the fullness of God!”

EPHESIANS 3:17-19 TPT

The Spiritual foundations that we have established in our life determine whether or not we live in a constant love overflow or if we live in a constant love deficit.

When we live with a love overflow we can easily be a generous lover in our marriage.

But if we live with a love deficit, we will be forever needy in our marriage - no matter how much our spouse pours love into us we will be like a leaky bucket. The exciting opportunity for us is to mature into a person who has the ability to constantly receive divine love perfectly and to give perfect expression to divine love.

Nothing can position us better to be an extravagant lover in our marriage than establishing strong spiritual foundations.

OUR SECRET DARKNESS

Are you ready to start paying the price required to live a life of mind-blowing intimacy?

It starts here. It starts by laying spiritual foundations.

Just like Marina who came face to face with her own darkness and emptied herself of the false definitions of her identity that came through years of abuse and trauma, if you want to break free from living in a love deficit and step into a love baptism you are going to have to confront your own darkness.

For many of us this is extremely painful.

For some it may be unbearable right now.

This journey almost always brings us face to face with our deepest levels of shame. Satan knows that if he can attach intense shame to the lies that we believe about ourselves we will find it extremely difficult to face our own darkness and we may never get free.

It's for this reason that Satan targets sexuality so brutally. The pain, the dysfunction, the twisted nature of this form of abuse and trauma produces a terrible sense of shame that makes it very difficult to confront our own stories, our own darkness and our own traumas.

The biggest lies that we believe are usually connected to trauma of some kind. It could be any experience at all that produces pain or shame.

These experiences are often connected to our key relationships such as our father, mother, siblings, extended family or friends.

The cause of our pain and shame could be abuse like Marina, or it could be neglect, dysfunctional relationships, betrayal, sin, failures or even words that people have spoken over our lives.

It is in our places of greatest trauma that we often begin to believe the deepest lies about who we are.

For all of us, confronting our darkness is part of the non-negotiable price tag for building the exhilarating passionate and heart blazing intimacy that we truly desire.

It starts here. It starts with facing up to our darkness, our fears, our dysfunction and our own story – but it leads us to a world where we begin to experience a perpetual love overflow.

One thing that doesn't work is comparison.

Your story is your story. Something that is a huge deal for you might not seem like a big deal for someone else. Never get caught in comparison – it is the thief of joy. My story might not seem like a big deal for someone else, but it's a big deal for me.

For me, my deepest level of shame came from my secret sin. When I was a little kid, I played doctors and nurses with some other kids. There was nudity and silly games and although there was nothing abusive, the lies that I believed about myself after that experience plunged me into a world of internal self-hatred and shame.

The shame was so intense that it created a trigger in me and if someone brought it up I could instantly snap into a violent rage.

It took years for me to finally get the courage to face up to it. I told God I would confess it to him and then take it to my grave.

God told me to go and connect with the people from my childhood memories and I freaked out. It was the most terrifying thing God ever asked me to do.

But the day that I did...

The level of freedom that I experienced was one of the most amazing feelings of my life. By facing up to my darkness, it opened the door into a world of freedom. These were the first steps into a world of supernatural love that I never knew existed.

It was one of the scariest processes of my life – opening up to the deepest levels of my secret sin, shame and self-hatred, facing the lies that I believed all my life and allowing the truth to redefine me.

In fact that season of confronting my darkness was one of the most powerful and life transforming seasons of that I have ever experienced.

If we want to become the lovers that we were created to be, we must leave behind a lifetime of darkness, lies and love deficits and truly discover what it means to be baptised in the supernatural love of our Father in Heaven.

It's not a 5 minute process. It's a journey that we must devote our lives to. It's what Paul wrote about in Romans 12:2:

² “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

There is no other journey that has the ability to produce more life transformation and a greater blessing in our lives and marriages than the journey of spiritual freedom that comes from discovering that we are exclusively defined in the image of God.

Remember I said that the orphan state of being produced a love deficit? Well at the start of my journey that's what I knew – an orphan's portion. A heartful of internal darkness; shame and self-hatred that was disconnected from the supernatural love of God.

But all of that was about to change and I had no idea what was coming...

THE DIVINE DANCE

For centuries, Church Fathers and theologians have used the Greek word “Perichoresis” to capture the essence of what the relationship within the Trinity truly looks like.

Before time began – there was God: The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit.

The Greek word “Perichoresis” is most simply translated and described as the “Divine Dance”.

Imagine with me, if you can...

All that exists is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit dancing together before time began in a seamless harmonious union, infused perfectly with the most dynamic, powerful, extravagant, wild, gentle and exquisite expressions of love that have ever and will ever exist – culminating in the most abundant and glorious demonstrations of delight that have ever and will ever be known...

Imagine with me, if you will...

The fullness of the infinite power of God concentrated into one giant laser cannon of pure, supernatural, divine love, so wonderful that words could never hope to articulate even a single percentage of its unspeakable, unfathomable goodness, warmth, kindness, wonders, ecstasy, bliss, euphoria, happiness, joy and delight...

Now... Imagine with me God the Father turning that giant laser cannon of divine love on Jesus and blasting Him with absolutely everything it had, holding nothing back – completely unleashing the entirety of His divine love on His Son!!!

Imagine Jesus, being hit with this laser cannon of love – more powerful than a million bolts of lightning love!

Except these intense beams of love are not actually coming from a cannon, rather they are coming from the Father's eyes and every glance of His eyes is like a thousand waterfalls of love, like lightning, like fire, like oil, like being consumed in an ocean of divine love!

As Jesus is hit by the Father's gaze, everything slows down. The love that comes from His eyes is softer than silk but stronger than steel. It's the most gentle love there has ever been, yet it is the greatest force in existence. It is calming and soothing yet it is a raging fire of love that consumes every aspect of His entire being. It is an intense encounter, yet it is in perfect harmony with the most eloquent dance that has ever been danced.

Then Jesus turns His gaze, which is just as intense and powerful on Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit turns His equally intense gaze upon Jesus, then on the Father... and they relentlessly, throughout eternity blast each other with the purest, most extravagant, most overwhelming measures of divine Love that have ever and will ever exist.

I am aiming to help you capture the wonder of the "Divine Dance"...

It's an indescribable - unbroken cycle of the most flawless and spectacular masterpieces of love in all creation and beyond.

It's perpetual expressions of divine love that never flinch, never relent and never reduce in their intensity or consistency...

Each member of the Trinity receives this divine love perfectly and gives perfect expression of this divine love to the other members of the Trinity in the most creative, the most outrageously abundant and the most excellent ways divinely conceivable...

The Fellowship of the Trinity, Perichoresis, the “Divine Dance” is an explosion of the most mind-bending expressions of love divinely conceivable... Each member of the Trinity pours out the fullness of their power, they hold absolutely nothing back, but spend themselves entirely in their exuberant, extravagant, heartfelt expressions of love that they lavish on one another.

It was in this setting, in the context of this radical love that the Trinity conceived one of the most powerful ideas that they have ever had.

That idea was - you.

The original idea that they had was that you would be a perfect dance partner, created with the capacity to participate equally in the dance.

They created you in their image – so that you would be fully capable of participating perfectly in “Perichoresis”.

I want you to imagine with me again...

This time you are the object of the Trinity’s affection.

The gaze of divine love is fixed on you and at exactly the same moment all three of the Trinity unleash the fullness of their love and utterly baptise you in the most glorious expression of love that you have ever tasted in your life!

You can literally taste it!

Supernatural love has entirely consumed you! You can see it wrapping around your body like flames and arcing bolts of electrical current, you can hear it pulsating and reverberating through every cell in your being; body, soul and spirit. You can taste it with every cell in your body and the fragrance of divine love has permeated the entire atmosphere!

Speechless, you collapse, in the most blissful, gentle, multi-dimensional, paradoxical state of your life!

You've never felt so peaceful – yet you feel like a thousand waterfalls of pure love are crashing over you every second.

You feel freedom like never before – but you feel the volts of a million bolts of lightning love zinging through your entire being.

You feel like you're walking with God in the cool of the day – except that you've never been so ablaze with the fires of love!

You feel like you're walking on water but at the same time you feel like you're swimming in an ocean of divine love and liquid love is flowing right through you...

Everything is quiet but the love of God is like thunder in your heart!

You can't even walk, yet somehow you can dance, and carried by the Spirit you rise and take your place that was prepared for you before time began – flowing effortlessly with the rhythms of the Trinity as you receive and express divine love in a timeless realm of intimacy, oneness, ecstasy and unrelenting waves of pure divine love.

When Psalm 37:4 talks about “delighting yourself in the Lord” that's a tiny snapshot, with plenty of poetic licence, into what that delight really looks like.

Delight is the pinnacle expression of Love.

The purest expression and definition of love can only be beheld in the smiles and in the eyes of the Trinity as they radiate and blaze divine delight with every gaze as they come face to face with each other and face to face with us...

In that place of face to face, heart to heart, Spirit to Spirit embrace a supernatural love is found that permeates the very fabric of our entire being.

It is absolutely critical that we do not dilute this definition of divine love.

Regardless of our personal disappointments, disconnections or frustrations – we must never allow our experiences to pollute our definition of the timeless, infinite, beauty, intensity, holiness and extravagance of divine love.

Participating seamlessly and effortlessly in “Perichoresis”, the “Divine Dance”, has always been the original design for your life. Seamless union in the “Divine Dance”, is the greatest place of alignment that you could ever find yourself in.

The ultimate calling on your life, far beyond doing things or working for God, has always been to be perfectly, radically, extravagantly, outrageously, wildly, crazily loved by the Trinity!

The ultimate call of God on your life is to be loved by the Trinity with the exact same intensity with which they love each other!

You can't give more love than you've got. If you're living in a love deficit, you're going to be a needy, chaos-causing lover. If you're living in a perpetual love baptism – you will be positioned to become an extravagant, generous lover who creates a marriage where both the husband and the wife have all their needs, wants, dreams and desires abundantly satisfied.

For those who are ready to go deep into their identity, into freedom, into a love baptism and into the bliss of Sonship, we have created “The Online School of Sonship” to help facilitate this transformational journey. www.raisingroyalty.com/7-sacred-pathways (this link gives you access to both the 7 Sacred Pathways and School of Sonship training).

If you are not already a part of “The Online School of Sonship” I encourage you to join us there and join people from all over the world on the beautiful journey into the bliss of Sonship.

If you’re ready to go real deep – that’s the place to be. We look forward to having you with us.

Chapter 5

Sacred Pathway Number 2

The Emotional Pathway

The Emotional Pathway determines how effective you are at creating the sweetest type of intimacy possible...

In this chapter we are going to explore 3 Key Lessons to mastering the Emotional Pathway and creating the sweetest intimacy possible.

1. Safe Atmospheres
2. Love, Honour, Trust & Respect
3. Vulnerability

SAFE ATMOSPHERES

An atmosphere can shift from safe to unsafe based on the tiniest detail. The consequences of failing to master your ability to create safe atmospheres are severe, just as the rewards of mastering your ability to create safe atmospheres are dramatic.

This section on safe atmospheres will help you understand the dynamic ways that the spiritual and Emotional Pathways interact either to destroy intimacy or to cause the most beautiful expressions of intimacy that we have ever imagined possible.

We are about to explore the four areas that dictate our ability to create safe atmospheres.

1. Spiritual beliefs and world view
2. Our brain and mental processing
3. Emotions and chemical reactions in the body
4. Behaviours

THE SPIRITUAL REALM

Our beliefs that shape our image of God, our identity, our origins, our future, our values and our perspective on what is true and false, good and evil and what is right and wrong belong to the spiritual realm. These beliefs are the beliefs that shape our thoughts, our direction, our emotions and our behaviours.

Jesus said in John 8:32 that we would know the truth and that “the truth would set us free”. He understood that if we believe a lie, it gives the Satanic realm the ability to curse and oppress our lives.

What we believe dictates our interaction with the spiritual realm and whether we walk in freedom, favour and blessing or in bondage to oppression and curses.

Our beliefs create our world view and we process all the information that we receive through our world view. Changing our beliefs is the key to producing personal transformation in our lives. Most of these beliefs operate on auto pilot subconsciously and unconsciously controlling our lives.

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

MARK 1:15 NIV

The Greek word used here for repent is the word “metanoeo”. So often in church we are taught that repenting means to stop doing something sinful and to make a 180-degree change. But to repent simply means to change the way that you think. The way that you think determines how you interact with the natural and the supernatural world around you.

Repentance does lead to behavioural transformation, but it happens through changing our beliefs not through will power.

You already know that I believe our free-will, self-control, personal sovereignty or will power is one of the greatest gifts that God has given us. But will power is no match against our belief systems. Just trying hard to change a behaviour without addressing the belief that is the root cause of a behaviour seldom works for very long.

We behave according to what we believe.

Combining will power with the true meaning of repentance, which means to change the way that you think, will turn you into an unstoppable force on your journey of transformation.

THE BRAIN AND MENTAL PROCESSING

There's a significant cross over with the functionality of our brain, our spiritual beliefs, our subconscious and unconscious beliefs, our feelings, our emotions, the chemicals in our body, our mind's ability to process information to make cognitive decisions and our capacity to create deep intimate connections.

I know that's a mouthful right...

Let's break it all down and I'll show you how this plays out in our love lives.

Separating everything out nicely and neatly is not so easy. It's more like a tangled fishing net of intertwined systems. Let me attempt to share a simplified overview around how brain function impacts our ability to create the sweetest intimacy possible.

Like I said this is kind of like a jumble of fishing nets...

For most of our actions, communication and daily tasks we operate out of the cognitive, conscious part of our mind. The area of the brain that we engage for cognitive tasks and logical thinking is the frontal cortex.

The frontal cortex is a large part of the brain that rests directly behind the forehead. You could say that when we are operating out of our frontal cortex people see the best side of us, the nice side, the smart side, the calm and clever problem-solving side of us and the polite side of us. The frontal cortex is where thinking, reasoning, decision making and planning all take place.

To create the sweetest intimacy possible, we need to be operating out of our frontal cortex. Let me explain this a little more...

We also have a well-meaning dark side to our brains.

It's called the amygdala. The amygdala is a very small part of the brain with a lot of power. You actually have 2 small amygdalae, roughly the size and shape of an almond.

The amygdala is responsible for survival. It's the part of the brain that controls our fight or flight reflexes. Remember I'm simplifying this a lot. The amygdala does other cool stuff too, but for now the most important thing to understand is that it controls our fight or flight reflexes.

The amygdala is responsible for survival and it is extremely fast. You need this in a survival situation – explosive speed, force, power, energy and strength.

It's so fast and explosive that it makes our clever frontal cortex look like a sloth.

Our brains rapidly process all the information that we receive on a moment-by-moment basis through the filter of our world view and beliefs in order to determine how to respond on a moment-by-moment basis to our ever-changing environment.

An example of this would be the different reaction people have to a mouse walking into a classroom. I've actually had this experience while teaching. A mouse walked into the class. The instant one of the students (a lovely lady in her thirties) saw the mouse she went into instant full-on, irrational survival mode.

While I was talking, this lady began screaming uncontrollably as she leapt up on top of the table, that the other students were sitting around, and without a thought threw her drink bottle across the room!

I saw the mouse and didn't think anything of it at all, apart from the fact that it was kind of funny that a mouse had walked into the class and we probably needed to put out some poison and some traps.

Everyone in the room responded in their own way based on their subconscious and unconscious beliefs regarding mice.

When Alanna and I were in Mozambique, Africa, the locals loved to eat mice. They would put whole mice on sticks and roast them over the fire to make mice kebabs.

If some of our friends from Mozambique had been in the room – they would have had a different response entirely... They would instantly have gone into hunt mode to prepare for a nice afternoon snack.

ALANNA

I was once in a classroom in Japan teaching English to teenage girls. All of a sudden, the whole class started screaming at the top of their lungs, getting onto their chairs and desks, taking off their shoes and throwing them at the floor! I was standing with a friend at the front of the class in absolute bewilderment, wondering what was going on. Once all the shoes were thrown, and most of the screams had subsided, we learned that a cockroach had crawled onto the floor in the middle of the class.

It took us picking it up, wrapping it in some paper and disposing it down the hall before the girls came off their chairs and sorted out their shoes from the pile. We found it quite amusing!

Our brains operate at an incredible speed processing all the information coming in from our surrounding environment through the lens of our world view, that is all of our beliefs stored in the subconscious and unconscious parts of our mind, to figure out how we should be responding to the unfolding circumstances around us.

Our brain receives information. In less time than it takes to blink, it cross-references that information with our belief system and comes back with the appropriate response for our current situation on a moment-by-moment basis.

This happens in the subconscious and unconscious parts of our mind. It's always happening on auto pilot without us having to consciously think about doing it.

In this situation of the mouse, my belief system reported back to my brain that this was a pretty funny situation, made even funnier when the student was standing screaming at full volume on top of a table, in front of a class full of other students, who were wondering what was going on.

The student's brain told her this was an extremely dangerous, life-threatening event and the only correct response was pure terror.

If one of our friends from Mozambique had been there, their belief system would have told them it was time to go into hunt mode.

What happened for my student is sometimes referred to as an “amygdala hijack”. A psychologist by the name of Daniel Goleman coined the phrase “amygdala hijack” in his 1995 book, “Emotional Intelligence”.

Your amygdala is like a black ops security force living inside your brain. It processes all your information faster than any other part of the brain. Its job is survival at any cost. Remember, when you are operating out of your frontal cortex people see the clever, polite, problem solving lovely person that you are – but if your brain believes that your survival is in danger and you experience an amygdala hijack, you can forget polite. Things are about to go beast mode.

The moment that your amygdala gets confirmation from your belief system that you are in danger, it goes into an instant code red!

There's a power struggle here for the tiniest fraction of time...

If the threat is actually low to moderate, your frontal cortex wrestles back control from your amygdala, but if the threat is confirmed as serious, the amygdala takes control of your entire life in that instant.

When your amygdala goes into code red and goes full beast mode, it instantly shuts down access to the frontal cortex and puts your whole body into survival mode.

Now, your frontal cortex that shows off all the nice, clever and polite sides of who you are is completely out of the game and your amygdala has assumed full command and control!

Your amygdala doesn't care if you are on top of a table screaming uncontrollably in public. Your amygdala is like a honey badger, one of the most intense beast mode creatures in Africa "amygdala don't care".

Your amygdala only cares about one thing - survival.

When you are operating out of your frontal cortex you can do so many nice things, clever things and charming things.

The moment that an amygdala hijack takes place you can say goodbye to thinking, reasoning, decision making and planning.

During an amygdala hijack, you have no access to that part of your brain. It is in full lockdown and there are only 2 buttons to press in the amygdala command centre.

Fight or Flight!

...and it doesn't matter which button of those 2 you press – they both release a supersonic blast of adrenaline and cortisol through your limbic system right through your entire body.

Adrenaline and cortisol basically prep your body to go into ultimate beast mode in an instant. From 0 to 100 in under a second!

These 2 stress hormones released through the adrenal glands can save your life – but they can also ruin it.

You were not designed to live in the fight or flight state.

Unfortunately, many children are raised in a context where they are always in a fight or flight mode.

Anytime someone is in a stressful environment for an extended period of time they are in danger of building up high levels of cortisol in their bodies. Cortisol does not automatically leave the body. So, if you experience prolonged stressful experiences or trauma, you can experience a cortisol overload as it gets stored in your body.

Here are some of the symptoms of high levels of cortisol.

- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Headaches
- Intestinal problems, such as constipation, bloating or diarrhoea
- Anxiety or depression
- Weight gain
- Increased blood pressure
- Low libido, erectile dysfunction or problems with regular ovulation or menstrual periods
- Difficulty recovering from exercise
- Poor sleep

High levels of stress and regular “amygdala hijacks” also produce another issue in your brain. They weaken your frontal cortex’s ability to withstand the power grabs of your amygdala. This means that the more you experience “amygdala hijacks”, the more powerful your amygdala becomes and the easier it gets for your amygdala to flick you into beast mode.

Know anyone with a “short fuse”? A short emotional fuse in a person that causes them to get angry or lose control easily is an example of someone who has lived in the fight or flight zone for so long that their amygdala has become extremely powerful and it can take over control from the frontal cortex at any point.

A person with a short fuse can go from a lovely calm person to a total emotional explosion in an instant and it happens on a regular basis, the moment anything makes them feel unsafe.

Another issue with cortisol build-up is that it is a stress hormone. So, the more cortisol you have in your body, the closer you will be to living constantly “on the edge” of an “amygdala hijack”.

This is another reason why some people can be “triggered” or can “flip out” really easily.

Higher levels of cortisol in your body reduce your resilience to stressful situations and make you more prone to an “amygdala hijack” than if you had lower levels of cortisol in your body.

Here’s 10 ways to reduce cortisol levels in your body. There are so many basic habits that you can include into your lifestyle to help reduce stress and cortisol, but here’s some foundational practises that you could start exploring.

Alanna and I aren’t doctors, these are just some common life hack options for you to reduce cortisol levels. If you recognise that your cortisol levels are very high, it is recommended that you see a health professional for advice.

- Reduce the stressful circumstances in your life...
- Deal with the spiritual beliefs that are endorsing fear, stress and anxiety.
- Get quality sleep (pretty hard with young kids, I know!)

- Get regular exercise, anything including going for a walk is beneficial
- Do something creative that you love
- Laugh, some doctors actually prescribe comedies!
- Have great sex!
- Get a massage

Learn about cortisol detoxing food and how to take great care of your gut health

Spend time praying in tongues! Neuroscientists have seen amazing results in regards to brain health and stress reduction in people who regularly pray in tongues

It's safe to say that when we experience an amygdala hijack we can do some pretty regrettable things and say some pretty regrettable things even to people that we deeply love.

Remember how I shared earlier that if someone brought up my secret sin I could instantly flip into a violent rage?

Well, that was the result of an amygdala hijack. The threats that trigger an amygdala hijack do not have to be physical. The moment that you feel unsafe for any reason the pressure starts building towards an amygdala hijack.

A stressful relationship can be one of the easiest ways to trigger an amygdala hijack, especially if you already have high levels of stress and cortisol in your body.

“The American Institute of Health estimates that 75–90 percent of all visits to primary care physicians are for stress-related problems.”

Dr Caroline Leaf

HERE'S 5 TIPS ON HOW TO REDUCE "AMYGDALA HIJACKS"

1: PRACTICE SELF AWARENESS

Now that you know about amygdala hijacks you can be more aware of the signs that you are starting to feel unsafe and that pressure could be building towards an amygdala hijack. It's better to remove yourself from the situation before an amygdala hijack takes place.

2: CREATE AN "EMERGENCY DE-STRESS PLAN"

Create an "Emergency De-stress Plan" for yourself. Write it down. Make it simple. Tell your partner what it is and keep accountable for your plan. If you start feeling the pressure building, then activate your "Emergency De-stress Plan".

3: ENGAGE YOUR FRONTAL CORTEX

There's a struggle between your amygdala and your frontal cortex. Engage your frontal cortex with simple thinking activities like counting or counting backwards or other simple tasks that will engage your frontal cortex and help it take back control.

4: INTENTIONALLY PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Not only does gratitude help to reduce cortisol levels, it actually strengthens your brain's ability to withstand an amygdala hijack. Gratitude works in the opposite way of an amygdala hijack. An amygdala hijack reduces your self-control and your frontal cortex's ability to withstand an amygdala takeover. Gratitude improves your brain health, improves the neuroplasticity of your brain and strengthens your ability to resist an amygdala hijack.

5: CONNECT

If amygdala hijacks are a common issue for you, then a powerful thing to do is connect with people that you can talk to about it. Support, accountability, encouragement, breaking the silence of suffering are tried and true life changers.

THE EMOTIONAL REALM

As we are starting to see more clearly now, our brains receive information and process it through the lens of our worldview and belief system to determine the correct response in each situation that we find ourselves in. Then the brain releases a chemical reaction that is deemed the most appropriate for that moment.

Those chemicals trigger our emotional responses. Our emotional responses dictate our ability to create safe atmospheres. The sweet intimacy that we are craving can only be cultivated in the context of safe atmospheres produced by safe emotions.

In one sense our emotions are chemical reactions. Primarily our belief system is dictating the correct emotional response that we should be having, but our lifestyle determines whether or not our bodies have the building blocks required to create a healthy balance of chemicals to ensure that our emotions can operate the way they are designed to.

A healthy balanced lifestyle has an enormous impact on our mental and emotional health. Food, exercise, prayer, environment, hobbies, relationships, sex, gratitude – everything that we do or don't do is impacting our brains, our chemicals and ultimately our emotional state of being.

Safe emotions are an absolute, non-negotiable in the process of creating the deepest level of intimacy and connection possible. In turn, that experience of deep intimate connection triggers further chemical reactions that create a dramatic positive impact on our mental and emotional health.

The opposite is also true, being starved of connection can have a significant negative impact on our mental and emotional health.

Our bodies are chemical factories and our brains regulate the chemical distribution based on the feedback that they receive from our belief system. We've seen how the hormones adrenaline and cortisol impact us, but there's 4 more chemicals that the brain releases that significantly impact our mental health and emotions.

You can't do mind without food, and you can't do food without mind, because they're integral to each other.

Dr Caroline Leaf

DOPAMINE

Dopamine is a feel-good chemical that your brain releases as a reward for achieving something. On the negative side, some people can become addicted to the dopamine hit. But normally dopamine is a feel-good motivational chemical that you experience when you tick a job off your to-do list or achieve a goal.

A FEW TIPS TO BOOST DOPAMINE LEVELS

Eat more protein. Consume probiotics. Get good sleep. Exercise regularly. Get plenty of sunlight. Practice Gratitude and Meditation. Have great sex. Alanna says go and eat some chocolate!

SEROTONIN

Serotonin is sometimes referred to as the happy chemical, due to its impact on happiness and mood. Low serotonin levels have been linked to depression.

A FEW TIPS TO BOOST SEROTONIN LEVELS

Get regular exercise and lots of sunlight. Explore diet options that support serotonin production. Have great sex.

OXYTOCIN

Oxytocin is a bonding chemical, nicknamed “the love hormone” it is released during childbirth and breast feeding and helps to create a bond between a mother and a child. Oxytocin is also released during sex, emotional connection, welcome physical contact and even when playing with your pet dog or cat.

A FEW TIPS TO BOOST OXYTOCIN LEVELS

Have great connection time with friends and family. Get a pet. Book in a massage. Have great sex. Have a baby.

ENDORPHINS

Endorphins have a similar effect to opiates like morphine, they can reduce pain and increase pleasure.

A FEW TIPS TO BOOST ENDORPHIN LEVELS

They're often triggered by pain or stress, but they are also released through exercise, diet, laughter, exhilarating experiences, great sex, your favourite music and among other things – eating chocolate!

EMOTIONS AND OUR LOVE LIFE

Taking great care of our emotional health is vital for a fantastic love life because it is through our emotions that we begin to set the atmosphere and culture around our lives. If we are able to create an atmosphere, where people feel safe enough to relax and to be themselves, we set the scene for people to open up, to be real, to be vulnerable and to be transparent.

The level of safety that people feel in the atmosphere around you will determine the level of vulnerability that they are happy to share with you and the level of vulnerability in a relationship is what determines the level of intimate connection that you will experience in that relationship.

If your emotions are unsafe, people will close up around you and there is no amount of force, money or power that can re-create the atmosphere produced by safe emotions.

Even more powerful than our emotions, when it comes to creating a safe atmosphere around our lives, is our physical behaviour. As we have just seen, especially in the context of an amygdala hijack, our emotions have a huge influence on our physical behaviour.

PHYSICAL BEHAVIOUR

While our emotions set the stage for the atmosphere around our lives, it's our physical behaviour more than anything else that solidifies and establishes the atmosphere and culture around our lives.

The words that we speak. The way that we treat people. The things that we do. Every single action creates atmosphere. Every action determines, whether or not you are a safe person. Every action determines whether or not other people will open up around you or hide within themselves.

This applies to husbands and wives too. Being married does not give you a free pass to act in an unsafe manner and still expect your spouse to provide vulnerability on tap.

Regardless of the context – intimacy requires vulnerability and vulnerability requires safety.

CREATING SAFE ATMOSPHERES

Years ago, I saw a beautiful picture that has always stayed with me. It was a picture of a baby snail and I'm guessing it was with a mummy snail, the mummy snail had her antennae fully extended and looked like a very happy and confident snail.

The little baby snail had its antennae fully extended too. Both of them looked like a picture of what it means to be fully alive and thriving.

What was so special about that picture? It wasn't actually the snails themselves. The picture captured a rare glimpse of an atmosphere where we can all thrive.

It was a picture of a safe atmosphere.

A snail is a great example, because when a snail feels safe, it literally comes out of its shell and out of itself. Only when a snail feels perfectly safe does it fully extend its antennae.

At the slightest sign of danger, it withdraws its antennae immediately. When things get really scary – it isolates itself completely and hides right back inside its own shell.

We cannot experience intimacy if we live like a snail in its shell. We can only experience the beauty of the sweetest intimacy possible when both people in the relationship feel so safe that they are like the happy, confident snails with their antennae fully extended.

The mummy snail had created a perfectly safe atmosphere and baby snail was loving it!

Fully exposed and perfectly safe.

The mummy snail had mastered the art of creating safe atmospheres and everyone in her sphere of influence were the benefactors of the atmosphere that she carried.

Creating safe atmospheres is the direct result of safe emotions and safe behaviours.

If we truly desire to experience the sweetest intimacy possible, then we must become masters of our emotions, masters of our behaviours and masters of creating safe atmospheres.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS THAT HELP CREATE SAFE ATMOSPHERES

One of the most important pieces involved in the process of a couple creating safe atmospheres that will lead to the sweetest intimacy possible is good information.

Assumptions in a relationship are toxic, highly dangerous, risky and unnecessary. Time and time again they have proven to be ticking time bombs. To assume is to make an 'ass' out of 'u' and 'me'.

Assuming that you know what, the problem is or how your partner feels about something is a dangerous and unnecessary risk in any relationship. Assuming that your partner knows there is a problem is also dangerous.

Especially when the solution is so easy.

The solution to assumptions is good information. Good information is vitally important to a fantastic marriage, and it is a non-negotiable in the process of creating the sweetest intimacy possible.

However, for many couples the process of giving each other good information is so terrifying that it becomes a missing foundation in their relationship.

If we do not provide our partners with good information on our thoughts, our feelings, our desires, our hopes, our dreams, our disappointments, our pain, our fears, our frustrations, our challenges, and everything else that is going on in our hearts and minds then we rob our partners of the opportunity to create authentic intimacy.

Out of a desire to protect ourselves from rejection, we sentence ourselves to isolation.

We believe the lie that rejection is too scary, while forgetting that isolation is much more destructive. Rejection is out of our control, but isolation is a self-inflicted wound.

Good information that paves the way to the sweetest intimacy possible can only happen through vulnerable communication.

For many of us vulnerability carries an intrinsic sense of fear because vulnerability goes hand in hand with the possibility of rejection.

The deeper the level of vulnerability the greater the potential is for rejection.

As a result, many of us avoid vulnerability, without realising that the opposite is also true:

The deeper the level of vulnerability, the greater the potential for intimacy.

This is where the dynamic process of creating safe atmospheres, vulnerability, trust, and unconditional acceptance can create some tension for us...

What must come first?

To create safe atmospheres you need good information, which first requires vulnerability, which first requires trust, which first requires safe atmospheres, which first requires unconditional acceptance, which first requires vulnerability, which first requires trust, which first requires...

This cycle could paralyse a relationship. They are all necessary – but one thing must come before them all.

What is really needed first is courage.

Like it or not the process of creating the sweetest intimacy possible is dangerous and risky and even though we are aiming to create safety, we can't get there without first taking calculated risks.

The risk required of couples here is uncut, naked, courageous vulnerability that braves the possibilities of rejection in pursuit of a pearl of great price – intimacy in its most glorious form.

This is a principle that we see God modelling so well. He has given us the power to choose: do we want intimacy with Him or not?

Love doesn't want control. Love doesn't want slaves. Love doesn't want obligation. Love wants the real thing.

Love wants to be chosen. Love wants to be special. Love wants to be fought for.

Love wants the sweetest intimacy possible, and love is willing to pay the price for it – even if it means facing our fears of vulnerability and rejection. Despite how much God longs for relationship with us – He has given us the freedom to choose, whether we will accept His invitation to intimacy or reject Him completely.

That's what the 2 trees in the garden were about – love, vulnerability, intimacy, and rejection.

It's all a choice and every person has to wrestle with whether or not they are willing to pay the price of vulnerability in order to purchase the prize of the sweetest intimacy possible.

One of the objectives of vulnerability is giving your partner good information.

If you want your partner to be able to create the safest atmospheres for you possible, if you want your partner to create an atmosphere that causes you to come alive and truly thrive – then you must supply them with good information about what is happening in your heart and mind.

Remember, the purpose of supplying your partner with vulnerable information is to give them the opportunity to take your feedback onboard and to create a safe atmosphere, where the sweetest intimacy possible can thrive.

Receiving vulnerable information well is more important than giving it.

When someone takes a risk and becomes vulnerable and provides you with good information about how your emotions or behaviour made them feel unsafe – they will be looking to see whether you value intimacy with them enough to take their feedback on board.

The road to the sweetest intimacy possible is a road of a thousand courageous conversations. It's a journey of listening, learning, changing, growing, and building your wildest dreams together!

THE 4 “I FEEL, I NEED” STATEMENTS

Providing Good Information Is An Invitation To Intimacy.

Not everyone will always steward good information wisely and we will talk about boundaries shortly.

But right now, I'd like to share a simple template for giving each other accurate and helpful information that gives us the opportunity to choose whether we value intimacy enough to steward the information we have received wisely.

This template has been around for a long time, some people refer to it as “I statements” others call it the “I Feel, I Need” formula, you may know it by another name.

It's a very simple and effective communication tool.

If you ever feel unsafe in your relationship, the first thing is to manage yourself.

ALANNA

We regularly tell our children, “Who can you control in this situation?” and we encourage them to check their own behaviour and response to situations before that of their siblings. Once those involved have got themselves under control then you can all move forward with the resolve.

Do your best not to trigger and fall into an amygdala hijack. If you do, then go with your “Emergency De-Stress Plan”.

Calm yourself down if needed. Give yourself some time, or allow your spouse the time they need. Get yourself into a good space for communicating and then, when you can behave as a safe person, frame what you want to say with the following structure.

Never try to do this while you are still triggering – it's impossible to do it well in that state. You need your frontal cortex in action to do this well without causing more mess and collateral damage.

HERE ARE THE 4 “I FEEL, I NEED” STATEMENTS

STATEMENT 1

When you did _'this'_ I felt_____

The aim of Statement 1 is to ensure that there are no accusing statements, no inflammatory statements, and no attacking statements. You want to identify the specific behaviour or action that made you feel unsafe.

Remember you are trying to give them good information. If you do this with a lot of emotion, if you are getting intense, if they feel threatened or challenged, then your communication is not going to be as effective as it could be.

Be aware, vulnerability is scary for most people, even receiving good information could put someone on the edge of their own amygdala hijack.

If we use attacking words or we are carrying intense emotions, we could start the whole amygdala hijack cycle all over again.

Present your information clearly, calmly and without any attack in it. Highlight the behaviour or action that caused the issue.

STATEMENT 1 EXAMPLES

Wife: I felt unsafe when you drove the car at twice the speed limit on the way home today.

Husband: When you spent \$5,000 on jewellery without talking to me, I felt unsafe.

STATEMENT 2

I felt unsafe because _____

Statement 2 is a great opportunity to get vulnerable and give your partner good information about exactly how their action or behaviour made you feel.

STATEMENT 2 EXAMPLES

Wife: I felt unsafe because I felt ignored, I felt out of control, I felt in danger of death, I felt in danger of writing off the car, I felt in danger of hurting someone else and of getting fined.

Husband: I felt unsafe because I felt unimportant, I felt irrelevant, I felt afraid, I felt frustrated, I felt left out of the conversation, I felt like our dreams were being compromised.

STATEMENT 3

I need to feel _____

Statement 3 is another wonderful opportunity to let your partner know exactly how you want to feel. This is a powerful opportunity to build culture in your relationship. What are the feelings that you want to be experiencing?

The real focus of this statement is to let your partner know all the feelings that make you feel safe. A lot of people simply say: "I need to feel safe." You can elaborate, for example: "To feel safe I need to feel appreciated, and I need to feel celebrated."

STATEMENT 3 EXAMPLES

Wife: I need to feel safe; I need to feel like I am not in danger of death, car accidents, hurting other people or being fined.

Husband: I need to feel safe; I need to feel important; I need to feel included in the conversation, I need to feel like we agree with how we spend our money, I need to feel like we are working on our dreams together.

STATEMENT 4

I feel safe when _____

In Statement 4 you let your partner know exactly how they can make you feel like that.

These 4 Statements give your partner the perfect information that they need to create an atmosphere that makes you feel safe - an atmosphere where the sweetest intimacy possible can bloom.

Wife: I feel safe when you drive at the speed limit.

Husband: I feel safe when we make our money decisions together.

Trying to convince someone to care about your needs without being vulnerable enough to communicate them is a fear driven exercise in futility.

DANNY SILK

ALANNA

It's also important to be able to mirror the above statements back to your spouse. This shows you are listening and that you have heard them correctly. Sometimes the things we say get warped in the space between our lips and their ears. It can take some patience and keeping control of our own emotions to get on the same page.

So in regards to the above conversation, the husband might say back to the wife something along the lines of;

Husband: *So, you're saying when I speed, you don't like it.*

The wife may reclarify along the lines of;

Wife: *I felt unsafe when you sped, I was worried for our safety, we could have lost control and got injured.*

Husband: *OK, you were worried that we may have an accident and get hurt.*

Wife: *Yes.*

Husband: *I'm sorry I didn't take your feelings into account when I was speeding. I didn't realise that it made you feel unsafe and I want you to feel safe when I drive. I will be much more aware of my speed next time.*

Wife: *Thank you for saying sorry, I'll help keep you accountable for keeping to the speed limit.*

In this way both husband and wife know they have heard each other correctly and they are on the same page.

Over time we have created our own version of the above statements, and they are often all combined into one or two sentences. But initially having them broken down helps to understand the rules of engagement.

LOVE, HONOUR TRUST & RESPECT

We cannot create healthy emotional connection without consistently maintaining healthy boundaries that create a culture of safety. The first steps towards healthy boundaries are understanding how love, honour, trust and respect are designed to function in our relationships.

Each person in a relationship must take ownership for their role in the relationship if they want the relationship to succeed. To do that well, we have to understand clearly what we are each responsible for. Let me share a concept with you that helped me grasp how love, honour, trust and respect really work in the relationship dance.

LOVE AND HONOUR

In any relationship, whether it is a romantic relationship or not, we are always responsible to bring love and honour. Love and honour are not dependant on the other person's behaviour, they are an expression of who we are.

Love expresses acceptance. Honour expresses value.

Love and honour are the most natural behaviours for a person who is walking in their God given identity. Other people may be unsafe, dysfunctional or inappropriate, but their behaviour does not control our values or behaviour. Whether other people are behaving well or not, we are responsible to continue acting in alignment with our values of love and honour.

Jesus is a revelation of the full spectrum of what love and honour look like. In the Bible when we read about His life, He invested most of His time into the selfless compassionate service of others in need. But He also made a whip and drove the money changers out of the temple.

Love is gentle and compassionate, but love is also as bold as a lion.

In relationships love is accepting and gracious, but real love will not permit intimacy without safety.

Jesus defines for us what it looks like to walk in honour. He expressed value for lepers and the least in society, but He also called out national leaders as vipers. Honour expresses value to all people, but it also calls out unsafe behaviour for exactly what it is.

Honour expresses value but honour never ignores unsafe behaviour.

Honour sees people the way that God sees them before they see themselves the same way. Honour recognises the intrinsic value of a person's humanity and speaks worth, dignity and value over people. We are responsible to carry honour into all our relationships. Kris Vallotton has a great quote on this, he says:

“We don't just honour people because they are honourable, we honour people because we are honourable.”

Just as we are responsible to carry love and honour as our baseline for relationships, we can expect others to treat us with love and honour as the baseline for all our relationships.

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

MATTHEW 7:12 NIV

Many people have a twisted view of what it means to love or be loved. As a result, they tolerate unacceptable behaviour in their marriage. They allow their spouse to treat them badly. To speak to them badly. They tolerate their spouse's unsafe emotions and behaviours. They permit intimacy without safety.

Even worse than tolerating our spouse's unsafe emotions and behaviours is justifying our own.

If we tolerate our spouse's unsafe emotions and behaviours and if we justify our own, then the whole culture in our marriage becomes unsafe. This creates a dysfunctional culture in a marriage and it is impossible to experience what God has really designed for marriage in an unsafe culture.

No one thrives in a marriage like that. No one experiences mind-blowing intimacy in a marriage like that. Everyone loses.

Love looks like something. It looks exceptional. It looks extravagant. It looks exhilarating. Love doesn't have a bad attitude. Love doesn't take its spouse for granted. Love refuses to lower the standard in marriage to a point where unsafe emotions and behaviours are an acceptable part of the culture.

⁴“Love is large and incredibly patient. Love is gentle and consistently kind to all. It refuses to be jealous when blessing comes to someone else. Love does not brag about one's achievements nor inflate its own importance. ⁵ Love does not traffic in shame and disrespect, nor selfishly seek its own honour. Love is not easily irritated or quick to take offense. ⁶ Love joyfully celebrates honesty and finds no delight in what is wrong.”

⁷ Love is a safe place of shelter, for it never stops believing the best for others. Love never takes failure as defeat, for it never gives up.

⁸ Love never stops loving.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8 TPT

Love raises the standard in marriage to align with the culture of Heaven. Heaven is the blueprint for a healthy marriage. The heartbeat of Heaven and God's blueprint for marriage is the "Divine Dance" a culture of receiving divine love perfectly and giving perfect expression to divine love.

The love that the Trinity has for us is infectious. When it comes alive inside of us, it starts to redesign our lives in the image of Heaven. It starts to redesign all our relationships in the image of Heaven.

As we grow in our experience of divine love, we start to see divine love and divine romance as the blueprint for our marriage. As a result, we lift the standard. We lift our expectations. We no longer accept a dysfunctional status quo as our normal. We no longer accept intimacy without safety.

When love and honour become the baseline for our relationships, the culture around our life and in all our relationships begins to align with the culture of Heaven.

TRUST AND RESPECT

We can love and honour people in their mess.

But trust and respect cannot be given as love and honour can be. Trust and respect are entirely the responsibility of the other person.

You do not have to earn love or honour from me. It's entirely my responsibility to walk in love and honour at all times regardless of other people's behaviour. But when it comes to trust and respect – it's all on you. If you want intimacy with me – trust and respect are not negotiable.

You earn respect through safe behaviour. You earn trust through consistent safe behaviour.

It's the same in our relationship with God. He loves us and honours us even in our darkness, but trust and respect are a process.

“So if while we were still enemies, God fully reconciled us to himself through the death of his Son, then something greater than friendship is ours.”

ROMANS 5:10 TPT

The parable of the talents and the minas are both parables about the process of earning trust and respect.

²¹“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.

²⁶But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.”

MATTHEW 25:21, 26-27 ESV

Respect grows when you demonstrate safe emotions and behaviours. Trust grows when you steward the respect given through consistent safe behaviour.

I can honour a person who is living in dysfunction and creating chaos all around their lives based on their intrinsic value – but I can’t respect that behaviour.

I can love a person who is struggling with addictions and lying to me – but I can’t trust them.

It is fair to expect to be treated with love and honour but it is not fair to expect that trust and respect will be given to you without first earning it. Being married for a long time is not justification for demanding trust and respect.

Especially in a marriage, trust and respect must be stewarded consistently through courageous conversations, good information, safe emotions, safe behaviour and creating safe atmospheres.

The best way to steward trust and respect is by consistently listening to and implementing the good information that you are receiving from your partner.

It doesn't matter what Bible verse you want to use, unsafe behaviour should not be respected and people who consistently demonstrate unsafe behaviour should not be trusted.

Unsafe behaviour needs to be identified and called out in a marriage in order to lay the foundations for healthy boundaries and a safe culture where intimacy can thrive.

In a dysfunctional relationship people sacrifice the possibility of creating a safe and healthy culture out of fear of “rocking the boat”. A relationship like this needs a complete overhaul, because it can never experience the intimacy that God designed for marriage.

That overhaul is going to begin by identifying unsafe behaviours, calling them out and refusing to tolerate them as part of the culture in your marriage. Rocking the boat, flipping the script and upgrading the culture is exactly what a dysfunctional marriage needs.

Deep connection, intimacy and divine romance flow abundantly from a marriage that has a baseline of love and honour and a baseline of trust and respect. Sacrificing the baseline of love and honour and trust and respect will only perpetuate your dysfunction for years to come.

To lay the foundation for healthy boundaries you must first establish a baseline of love and honour and trust and respect.

In our relationship I am responsible to bring:	In our relationship you are responsible to earn and steward:
Love	Trust
Honour	Respect

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

An expectation of love and honour is the foundation for healthy boundaries. Some people are so used to being treated badly by unsafe people that they accept being treated without love and honour. By accepting being treated without love and honour, we lower the standard of the culture around our lives and we enable people to live unchallenged in their dysfunction.

By accepting being treated without love and honour we contribute to the cycle of an unhealthy culture. That type of marriage will never experience the divine romance and the intimate union that God designed us for. The absolute last place that anyone should ever accept being treated without love and honour is in their marriage.

We have to break the cycle...

Forgiveness Restores The Standard In Our Lives.

KRIS VALLOTTON

If there is anywhere in your relationship that you are not being treated with love and honour you need to restore the standard. That starts with grace, mercy, forgiveness, courage, vulnerability and good information – but first it requires confrontation.

We can't have healthy boundaries without first having healthy confrontation.

Rather than embracing healthy confrontation many couples choose to punish each other. There's the 4 classic ways couples punish each other rather than dealing with their issues in a constructive way that can restore the standard and rebuild the type of intimacy and romance that dreams are made of.

4 CLASSIC WAYS COUPLES PUNISH EACH OTHER

1. AGGRESSIVE REACTIONS

unsafe emotions and behaviours; physical, sexual, mental or verbal abuse, rage emotions, loss of temper.

2. PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE REACTIONS

silence, creating distance, rejection, isolation and becoming unreliable.

3. DEVALUING BEHAVIOUR

sarcasm, cynicism, criticizing, shaming and focusing on the negative.

4. REVENGE

destructive behaviours like “an eye-for-an-eye”.

Some marriages are so dysfunctional that in order to keep the peace they avoid confrontation because of the fear of how their spouse will respond. If you are stuck in that place you are going to have to ask yourself what type of relationship do you really want? Your relationship is not going to change itself. If anything, relationships get worse not better without healthy confrontation and healthy boundaries.

Do you want to live in the relational swamp of dysfunction or do you want deep, passionate and beautiful connection? Intimacy comes with a price. Part of that price is healthy confrontation.

The first place to start is the “I Feel, I Need” statements, which requires courage, vulnerability and good information delivered in a safe way that is not going to cause an amygdala hijack.

Healthy boundaries refuse to accept being treated without love and honour. Healthy boundaries restore the standard of the culture in a relationship. Healthy boundaries are a great tool for restoring broken trust in a relationship.

Healthy boundaries should not be seen or used as a punishment. Healthy boundaries should be used to show people the way back to intimacy.

Alanna and I had broken each other's trust multiple times and healthy boundaries were the tool that brought us back to a place of intimacy beyond what we could have imagined.

Unfortunately, boundaries can get a bad reputation because a lot of people weaponise boundaries and use them to cut people off. They spiritualise punishing people by cutting them out of their lives and justify it by saying they put a healthy boundary in place, when realistically they were weaponising boundaries to punish people by cutting them off without giving them any good information.

Jesus gave us a blueprint for confrontation, reconciliation and conflict resolution in Matthew 18:15.

15 “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.”

Here we see Jesus highlight the keys of being vulnerable and giving good information with the hope of creating a better connection. Jesus didn't teach us to weaponise boundaries. He taught us to be vulnerable, to give good information, to seek reconciliation and to be peace makers.

That practise of weaponising boundaries comes from a mindset that thinks justice looks like punishment.

Jesus demonstrated that justice looks like redemption not punishment, one of the most beautiful examples of this was the woman caught in the act of adultery. Everyone around Jesus wanted Him to punish her.

⁴“Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?”

JOHN 8:4-5 NLT

Jesus wasn't looking to punish us. If God had wanted to punish anyone – that would have been the ultimate moment to come down hard! His focus was always redemption and He met this lady with great compassion and without a hint of condemnation.

Healthy boundaries don't punish people.

Healthy boundaries protect us from unsafe behaviour and at the same time they give people good information about how to come back home to a place of connection.

When you have a courageous conversation and give someone good information about how their behaviour is making you feel unsafe you have just presented them with an opportunity to build trust and respect with you.

If they respond by changing their behaviour to create a safe atmosphere for you then your courageous conversation and good information showed them the way back to intimacy.

If they refuse to take on board your good information and continue behaving in an unsafe manner they have demonstrated that they can't be trusted at this point in time and you may need to establish a healthy boundary to keep yourself safe.

Boundaries are necessary when others can't be trusted to behave safely.

For example if the issue was an unsafe driver, you may put in place a boundary like this:

If you continue to break the law when you are driving I will no longer be a passenger in a car that you are driving. When you are willing to drive safely and legally I will be happy to be a passenger in a car that you are driving. Until then, either I'm driving or we will be in separate vehicles.

This is a clear boundary. It has 4 good pieces of information in it:

1. It states what the unsafe behaviour is.
2. It states what you need.
3. It states the consequence for continued unsafe behaviour.
4. It states the reward for safe behaviour.

These 4 pieces of information put in place a firm boundary but they also show the way back to connection without attacking or accusing anyone.

The priceless ingredient of this process is that it does not seek to control the other person in any way. It is not threatening. It reveals that there are real consequences for unsafe behaviour, but it puts all the power in the other person's hands and gives them the option to choose the outcome that they want.

People don't always respond well to courageous conversations, good information or boundaries and it can be heart breaking and frustrating when someone doesn't value connection with you enough to make a behavioural change.

Occasionally we face experiences where a person is so unsafe that a courageous conversation is not possible. In this tragic circumstance your greatest options are time and prayer.

I've seen time and prayer produce exceptional transformations in relationships that seemed completely dead and buried. I want to highlight that deciding that someone is too unsafe to talk to is a last resort.

Sometimes that is the sad reality and the safest option. But it's a decision that we must make extremely carefully as it's far too easy and destructive to just to cut people off and over spiritualise it by saying you had to put a boundary in place.

A hard truth that we must balance this decision out with is this:

Is this person too unsafe or am I too insecure?

If the issue is that you are too insecure to have this conversation, perhaps a mediation is a good option.

When someone refuses to embrace safe behaviour willingly, healthy boundaries become our only safe option. This is not just for strangers. Husbands and wives who are repeatedly choosing unsafe behaviour need to have safe boundaries put around them until they can be trusted to act safely. Remember, the aim of a healthy boundary is always to lead them out of dysfunction and back home to the place of the sweetest intimacy possible.

If your attempts at confrontation are not going well, in Matthew 18:16 Jesus recommended mediation as your next best step.

16“But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’”

For a long time, Alanna and I had fake agreements that consistently broke each other's trust. Our fake agreements were around the areas of sex and sensuality. We were trying to improve things in the bedroom and after some counselling they recommended that we put in place scheduled sex nights and scheduled sensual nights.

So we did.

But our scheduled sex and sensual nights turned into fake agreements. We both started breaking trust with each other, neglecting each other and breaking the mutual promises that we had made to each other while we were with the counsellor.

It turned into a serious mess.

This is often where couples start their journey towards a better brighter future. From the context of a mess of unmet needs, broken trust and broken promises.

Regardless of what has broken trust or caused the mess in a relationship - the way forward is always the same. Consistent safe behaviour.

To restore a marriage of broken trust and broken promises it's going to require courageous conversations, vulnerability, good information and healthy boundaries.

We identified the elephant in the room in our relationship. Fake agreements. We had courageous conversations. Actually, a lot of our attempts at courageous conversations ended up being fantastic failures. Attempting a courageous conversation, getting vulnerable and sharing your deepest feelings doesn't always come out pretty. I definitely messed it up lots of times.

But we refused to give up. We kept embracing courageous conversations. We kept embracing vulnerability. We kept embracing good information.

Because of our mess we needed to put some healthy boundaries in place around sex and sensuality. Our first attempt at scheduled sex and sensual nights became a fake agreement.

A fake agreement is a set of boundaries or promises that no one adheres to or enforces.

Living with a fake agreement is like living in the wild west. There's danger everywhere and no one is safe. We made our agreement and set our boundaries with the counsellor, but we didn't stick to the agreement.

We created a big mess.

So, we started over.

We got vulnerable.

We had more courageous conversations.

We gave each other good information.

We re-negotiated.

We put healthy boundaries in place again.

We came up with a more achievable set of agreements. We set clear boundaries. We made a big effort to keep our promises to each other. At the same time, we were also working on ourselves – because no one else was breaking our boundaries for us. We obviously needed some personal growth.

Then it started to work...

We started to consistently demonstrate safe behaviour towards each other. Trust started to grow. Sex and sensuality became a safe place for us. Then it became a great place for us.

We experienced the power of healthy boundaries to lead us home to the sweetest intimacy possible. Healthy boundaries work every time, but they require powerful people to operate them. We will cover powerful people very soon...

VULNERABILITY

Would you rather be vulnerable with the risk of rejection, but the potential for phenomenal intimacy, or would you rather avoid the risk of rejection and condemn yourself to isolation?

We've talked a lot about vulnerability already, so this section will be short.

Vulnerability is terrifying for so many of us, but if we put it into perspective, it's a far better option than isolation.

If we refuse to embrace vulnerability because of the fear that other people may hurt us, then we condemn ourselves to a far worse outcome.

People always talk about the risk of rejection, but the risk of being rejected is nothing compared to the self-destructive certainty of isolation.

Isolation is much more toxic and damaging than rejection will ever be. Isolation is a self-inflicted certainty with no possible benefits. Isolation is definitely a scenario where your comfort zone is not your friend.

Yes, being vulnerable is difficult, but vulnerability is the non-negotiable highway to the fulfilment of your wildest dreams of connection, romance and intimacy. Are you willing to pay the price of vulnerability to reap the reward of your pearl of great price?

Chapter 6

Sacred Pathway Number 3

The Intellectual Pathway

The Intellectual Pathway Determines How Effective You Are At Loving Your Spouse In The Way That They Personally Want To Be Loved.

A WARNING ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

This chapter concludes with a call to extreme ownership, service and devotion to our spouses. That is not what the warning is for.

The warning is against people who would take this content and twist it to make unrealistic demands and to control their spouses. This chapter explores some of the exceptional benefits that are afforded by those who master the ability to create safe atmospheres, steward exceptional trust and unlock the right to mind-blowing intimacy.

The warning is – beware of people who seek to demand intimacy without first providing safety.

THE INTELLECTUAL PATHWAY

The Intellectual Pathway determines how effective you are at loving your spouse in the way that they personally want to be loved.

As a husband or a wife, you have the opportunity to become the leading world expert on how to love your spouse. Nobody else should know better than you what your spouse wants, when they want it and how they like it. Whether it's tea, coffee, your love life, your future or anything else, you have the opportunity to become the leading world expert on how to satisfy your spouse's needs, wants, dreams and desires.

To become the world's leading expert on what your spouse wants, when they want it and how they like it requires 2 things...

1. **Curiosity**
2. **Vulnerability**
3. **Curiosity**

If you want to experience the pleasures that are reserved only for those who unlock the most beautiful expressions of intimacy possible, then you must genuinely want to know what your spouse wants, when they want it and how they like it. You must be so curious that you devote yourself to knowing and understanding all the intricacies of their desires. You're going to have to get curious about all the details of what they want, when they want it and how they like it.

This means asking them questions, paying attention to the answers and devoting yourself to bringing their dreams to life. From their smallest dreams to their most magnificent dreams. As a husband or a wife, it's your privilege not only to be the leading world expert on your spouse, it is also your privilege to be their greatest support and their greatest fan championing them towards the fulfilment of their wildest dreams.

Together as husband and wife – you have the wonderful privilege of devoting yourselves to each other's success and to your needs, wants, dreams and desires. Together you get to be dream makers for each other.

VULNERABILITY

I know that I've said assumptions are dangerous, but for the moment, let's assume that 1) you have a spouse and 2) your spouse is so passionate about being your dream maker, that they can't wait to discover your needs, wants, dreams and desires. Curiosity must be met with vulnerability because your spouse's ability to become the world's leading expert on you depends completely on you giving them good information.

Don't communicate in clues or riddles. Don't be cryptic with your needs, wants, dreams and desires. Communicate them thoroughly. If you like something that they have done and you want more of that – communicate that to them clearly.

Don't assume that they can read your mind. If you want to be loved in the most intimate way possible, you have to unlock your deepest, most personal needs, wants, dreams and desires to your spouse.

This may mean that you have to figure out some of these answers for yourself. If you are doing that – let them know the process that you are going through.

Good communication is not based on what you said or what you thought you said. It's based on what they understood. In this sense, even as you communicate what you want, when you want it and how you like it – you must be learning the best way to communicate to your spouse so that they don't just hear your voice. A major aspect of mastering the sacred Intellectual Pathway is learning to communicate in a way that they understand everything that you want them to understand.

IT'S A DANCE

This is where curiosity and vulnerability must meet with such strong intentions to know one another that they overcome the numerous challenges, the fears and the awkward moments involved in effectively communicating detailed intimate desires. This is a dance. It's not one sided. It's a mutual passion to know and to be known that must be fuelled with so much desire that it enables you to overcome all the communication challenges and all the barriers to understanding each other's heart's desires.

It's also a dance because wants, needs, desires, and dreams change as you transition into new seasons. This process is not something that you can tick off your list. It's a living conversation. It's an ongoing dance.

The first goal of conversation: understanding not agreement.

Danny Silk

THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES

One of the elements of the Intellectual Pathway is understanding the 5 Love Languages. In 1992 Gary Chapman released his book *The 5 Love Languages*. This book has been immensely valuable for so many people and it is a key to understanding what your spouse wants. The 5 Love Languages are words of affirmation, quality time, physical touch, acts of service and receiving gifts. And number 6, in Alanna's case, good quality jewellery.

Each person receives love uniquely. You may find that you have more than one love language. You may find that in different seasons in your life your love languages fluctuate. As a spouse you have the opportunity to become fluent in your spouse's love languages. This is where curiosity and vulnerability must meet in order to discover the intimate details of how your spouse loves to be loved.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

The words of affirmation love language relates to expressing affection through appreciation, encouragement, compliments and other positive and affirming spoken words. When this is someone's primary love language, they will feel most loved by the words that you speak, the notes that you leave and the messages that you send. A few well-placed words have the power to light up their whole day and have their heart overflowing with love.

QUALITY TIME

When someone's love language is quality time they feel most loved when someone gives them their undivided attention. When you put down your cell phone, create eye contact and engage in actively listening and attentively focusing on them and being present in that moment – they feel the love big time! They are seeking quality over quantity and want to maximise the connection as you share this special moment together. One hot tip: loving on someone this way is to hold back from giving advice and to show up with a listening ear.

PHYSICAL TOUCH

If a person's love language is physical touch, they love being in close physical contact. Holding hands, snuggling, massages, sneaky touching and kisses fill their love tanks right up. Their favourite date may simply be snuggling on the couch and watching a movie. They crave physical contact.

I will add in here, that when I heard about the physical touch love language I knew instantly that this was me. I like it all. Sensual or sexual physical touch is right up there for me in terms of love languages. But I didn't understand the distinction between sensual and sexual touch which we will explore in depth in the next chapter.

ACTS OF SERVICE

A person with the primary love language of acts of service feels the love and appreciation deeply when people do lovely thoughtful things for them. Small but intentional actions flood their heart with love. They are often very caring in the way that they serve others.

RECEIVING GIFTS

To a person whose love language is receiving gifts, receiving a gift is about so much more than just the gift. For them gift giving is like a sacred process. Each part of the process is significant – how it was selected, why it was selected, how it is presented – getting those right is more important to them than the value.

To them the gift communicates that you intimately understand and appreciate them. A gift with no thought can be very upsetting and they can often remember nearly every gift they've been given from the people they love.

THE DANGEROUS FLIP SIDE

Our love languages make it easy to love us and easy to hurt us. If a words of affirmation person is verbally abused, if a quality time person is neglected, if a physical touch person is physically or sexually assaulted, if an acts of service person never receives any help and if a receiving gifts person gets caught in poverty – the wounds are so much greater and they hurt so much more than they would if the wounding was outside of their main love language.

Mastering the Intellectual Pathway doesn't just help us to love our spouse well, it also helps us to avoid hurting them by accident.

LOVE TANKS

Another concept that Gary Chapman mentioned is our love tanks. Do your love tanks feel full or do they feel empty? Are you feeling loved right now or are you feeling unloved?

A trap that we naturally fall into is thinking that other people want to be loved the same way that we want to be loved. When we understand the Intellectual Pathway, we prioritise discovering the intimate preferences of how our spouse loves to be loved. The 5 Love Languages is just the beginning of this journey.

If you are pouring out a lot of effort to love your spouse with gifts when they are a quality time person – then all your efforts to love them won't be filling up their love tanks at all.

In fact, they will probably be frustrated that you are out shopping when you could be home together.

Intellectual Intimacy is about understanding how to love your spouse the way they want, when they want and how they like it. Curiosity and vulnerability must dance together in order to come to a fusion of understanding more than just each other's love languages but understanding all of your deeply personal wants, needs, dreams and desires.

Only from this fusion of understanding each other on the most intimate level are you positioned to serve and champion one another towards your most personal dreams and aspirations.

LEAKY LOVE TANKS

I'm going to take it back to the Spiritual Pathway for a moment. Remember I talked about the "Orphan Mindset" and how it produces a love deficit?

Well, imagine a love tank with holes in the bottom of the tank. You could fill that tank up and then turn around to see that the tank, that was just full, is now empty. That's exactly what happens to us when we are living with an identity crisis.

An identity crisis turns us into constantly needy love leeches. It's not pretty. It's not nice for anyone. But the solution is beautiful and life changing – the solution is discovering our Sonship and being established in our identity.

Every lie that we believe about ourselves is a hole in our love tanks that leaves us feeling like we are not enough, we are unloved, unappreciated, unseen and unwanted. The wonderful thing is that every time we remove a lie from our belief system and replace it with the truth, not only do we patch the leak, the truth begins to bubble up as a fountain of life within us.

“Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

JOHN 7:38 ESV

You can imagine the challenges a marriage would face if you had 2 people with holes in the bottom of their love tanks, right? Imagine 2 love leeches sucking each other dry... That's exactly why the Spiritual Pathway is so vital – it empowers us to go from leaky love tanks to having a spring of love, life, joy and peace bubbling up from within us.

A marriage is at its finest when we are each individually living in the overflow of divine love. We were designed by God to be filled by His love and then to overflow to others. It's priceless to receive love from our spouse, but God's plan for us is that He would be our primary source of love. When we let God fill our love tanks first, we are empowered to love from a place of abundance. This divine overflow enables us to love generously, extravagantly and selflessly.

17 “Then, by constantly using your faith, the life of Christ will be released deep inside you, and the resting place of his love will become the very source and root of your life.

18–19 Then you will be empowered to discover what every holy one experiences—the great magnitude of the astonishing love of Christ in all its dimensions. How deeply intimate and far-reaching is his love! How enduring and inclusive it is! Endless love beyond measurement that transcends our understanding—this extravagant love pours into you until you are filled to overflowing with the fullness of God!”

EPHESIANS 3:17-19 TPT

PERSONALITY TYPES

Part of the dance of curiosity and vulnerability is exploring how we are wired individually. The Enneagram is a short and easy test that you can take online to explore how you and your spouse are wired. Just google Enneagram. There are a lot of personality tests available, they can be a good exercise to take together in the process of discovering the intricacies of how you are each wired.

If it helps you to understand what your spouse wants, when they want it and how they like it, then it's going to be a worthwhile exercise.

There are so many unique details about how your spouse is wired that you will discover in order to love them the way they love to be loved...

How do they process information – quietly or out loud? How do they like to rest? How do they like to communicate? How do they like to resolve conflict? How do they grieve? How do they like to celebrate? What type of holidays do they like? How do they like to socialise? What's the perfect food or drink for them for this moment?

DREAM MAKERS

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

EPHESIANS 5:25 NIV

This one statement should be enough to redefine our cultural norms around what God intended marriage to look like for us.

To me this paints a picture of husbands who are secure, extravagant, servant lovers with a relentless passion to satisfy their wives' wants, needs, desires and their wildest dreams! Let me unpack that starting in John 13.

³“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”

JOHN 13:3-5 NIV

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power. That’s a place of supreme security. There were no holes in Jesus’s love tank. That’s the first place to start for husbands. Discover your identity.

From that place of security, Jesus wholeheartedly embraced the role of a servant and washed His disciples' feet. From a place of security in our identity husbands can wholeheartedly and joyfully embrace the role of a servant in our marriages.

The goal is not good foot hygiene – the goal is to love our wives like Christ loved the church all the way into the fruition of their wildest dreams!

¹⁷“Then, by constantly using your faith, the life of Christ will be released deep inside you, and the resting place of his love will become the very source and root of your life.

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ Then you will be empowered to discover what every holy one experiences—the great magnitude of the astonishing love of Christ in all its dimensions. How deeply intimate and far-reaching is his love! How enduring and inclusive it is! Endless love beyond measurement that transcends our understanding—this extravagant love pours into you until you are filled to overflowing with the fullness of God!

²⁰ Never doubt God's mighty power to work in you and accomplish all this. He will achieve infinitely more than your greatest request, your most unbelievable dream, and exceed your wildest imagination! He will outdo them all, for his miraculous power constantly energizes you."

EPHESIANS 3:17-20 TPT

In Ephesians chapter 3:17-20 Paul defines how Christ loves the church into the fruition of its wildest dreams and beyond. In Ephesians 5 Paul calls out the husbands and says – “Now you husbands go love your wives like that!”.

This is obviously not about a one sided relationship. It's about all of us taking ownership. Extreme ownership.

In Genesis 3:12 Adam said to God:

“The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Adam was guilty as sin. But he tried to blame shift the issues. Yes what he said was correct, but really he was trying to justify his own dysfunction. If husbands took extreme ownership for what Paul called us to do, the culture of Christian marriages would be revolutionised.

Men, let's start by taking extreme ownership for loving our wives the same way that Jesus loves the church. Let's deal with our identity issues. Let's take responsibility for that task and watch what happens in our marriages.

The first thing that would happen is we would create safe atmospheres.

We would create the context and culture where it is safe to have vulnerable conversations. We would get curious about our wives and seek out what they want, when they want it and how they like it.

In the context of the safe culture that we created they would give us good information on how we can meet their needs, wants, dreams and desires. Then we could devote ourselves to meeting those needs and helping them to bring their wildest dreams to life.

What if husbands used the Bible to justify serving their wives rather than controlling them?

The end goal is that both husbands and wives would take extreme ownership for loving each other as Christ loves them. The end result of that would be marriages where each spouse acted from a place of security in their identity to wholeheartedly immerse their spouse in an extravagant love that satisfied their most intimate desires and launched them into their wildest dreams!

²¹ “And out of your reverence for Christ be supportive of each other in love. ²² For wives, this means being devoted to your husbands like you are tenderly devoted to our Lord, ²³ for the husband provides leadership for the wife, just as Christ provides leadership for his church, as the Saviour and Reviver of the body. ²⁴ In the same way the church is devoted to Christ, let the wives be devoted to their husbands in everything.

EPHESIANS 5:21-33 TPT

²⁵ And to the husbands, you are to demonstrate love for your wives with the same tender devotion that Christ demonstrated to us, his bride. For he died for us, sacrificing himself ²⁶ to make us holy and pure, cleansing us through the showering of the pure water of the Word of God. ²⁷ All that he does in us is designed to make us a mature church for his pleasure, until we become a source of praise to him—glorious and radiant, beautiful and holy, without fault or flaw.

²⁸ Husbands have the obligation of loving and caring for their wives the same way they love and care for their own bodies, for to love your wife is to love your own self. ²⁹ No one abuses his own body, but pampers it—serving and satisfying its needs. That’s exactly what Christ does for his church! ³⁰ He serves and satisfies us as members of his body.

³¹ For this reason a man is to leave his father and his mother and lovingly hold to his wife, since the two have become joined as one flesh. ³² Marriage is the beautiful design of the Almighty, a great mystery of Christ and his church. ³³ So every married man should be gracious to his wife just as he is gracious to himself. And every wife should be tenderly devoted to her husband.”

If anyone on the planet should be an expert on what you want, when you want it and how you like it - from tea or coffee, to the bedroom and everything else – it should be your spouse. If anyone on the planet should be your greatest supporter, your greatest fan and your greatest encouragement – it should be your spouse. If anyone should have an intimate understanding of your wants, needs, dreams and desires – it should be your spouse.

To master the Intellectual Pathway – you must become the world’s leading expert on what your spouse wants, when they want it and how they like it and then devote yourself to bringing those desires to life.

ALANNA

"Um, Benji, what if we don't know what we want?!"

For years I haven't known what I wanted and/or I haven't known how to put it into words.

I knew what I didn't want. For years I spent the days dreading going to bed and to be expected to fulfil Benji's needs. Knowing that it wouldn't happen and that we would have 'that' conversation again, that I could recite word by word, and feel the atmosphere of manipulation and disappointment wafting across from the other side of the bed as we had our backs turned to each other afterwards.

I was in a fog of burnout, babies, postnatal depression, poverty and just trying to survive and get through the day. I didn't have the mental space or energy for anyone else in the equation, let alone myself and the babies I was trying to keep fed, happy and healthy.

The few things I did feel that I needed, that I knew I needed, was overshadowed by the fact that Benji's needs weren't getting met. I needed sleep and to feel safe in my bed, I needed a break from all the pressure, I needed Benji home in the evenings to share the load, I REALLY needed some creative space, but all these things, if I did get them, were the first to disappear off our schedule if ministry stuff was happening; Benji going overseas or running a training intensive or, just because we ran out of time or space in the week.

It's a painful downhill spiral when you're both not getting your needs met.

I still struggle to always know what I want but this is where Benji has been helpful. He often asks me questions to help me (and himself) come to conclusions, to process things (I'm a verbal processor).

As I have a bit more time to myself, stress has decreased in many areas of my life, I've finally caught up on sleep, and we are doing better as a couple overall, I'm better able to analyse myself and rediscover what I enjoy doing and therefore know what I want. Being creative is really important to me as I know it's a space where I feel connected to God and relaxed and rejuvenated.

For all the years that we have been married it's only relatively recently that I am actually getting it and, out of that I get to know myself more and know what I want.

NEGOTIATION

This whole process really is a dance of giving and receiving. When we get the balance right in this process – our marriage starts to reflect the “Divine Dance” seen in the Fellowship of the Trinity. When we get the balance of giving and receiving right, then our marriages start to become one of the most beautiful examples of Heaven on Earth possible.

Getting the balance right looks like both the husband and the wife being extravagantly loved. We can only get the balance right when both people are walking in extreme generosity.

If we get the balance wrong and one or both people stop giving extravagantly – we lose all cadence with the “Divine Dance.” Instead – we end up with yet another marriage that is either lacking in the intimacy that God designed for marriage or another divorce statistic.

We lived out of balance for years and it meant that we both experienced a love deficit. Neither of us was receiving what we wanted, when we wanted it or how we liked it. Neither of us was being generous. It took a lot of vulnerable communication, healthy boundaries and generous negotiation to find our way home to a very happy place of balance.

Finding this balance is still a daily process for us and it requires a continual flow of safe atmospheres, vulnerable communication and generous negotiation. Obviously a marriage doesn't work the way it's designed to if one person is doing all the receiving and the other is doing all the giving.

There can be exceptions to this, for example health challenges, but even the exceptions, no matter how valid they are, will impact the level of intimacy that we experience. To maintain the intimacy that we were created for we must establish a balance of vulnerable communication and generous negotiation.

A marriage is at its best when each spouse is generously receiving what they want, when they want it and how they like it and when each spouse is generously giving what their spouse wants, when they want it and how they like it.

KEEP YOUR LOVE ON

If you haven't read it yet, we both highly recommend Danny Silk's book – "Keep Your Love On" as a fantastic resource on going deeper in the communication dance. It's the type of book that you use over and over again. It's a priceless resource for anyone.

Chapter 7

Sacred Pathway Number 4

The Sensual Pathway

The Sensual Pathway Is Non-sexual Physical Touch – Hugging, Holding Hands, Snuggling, Affectionate Touch And Kissing.

As I've shared already, I got totally confused with the physical touch love language. I didn't understand that physical touch needs to be divided into 2 entirely separate categories.

The Sensual Pathway and Sexual Pathways are 2 different pathways. Part of the reason I didn't realise they were different is because for me – I love it all! The way my brain was wired was that all touch should eventually lead to a happy ending - sex.

For Alanna she loves it when she can have a full body massage and then go straight to sleep. She is wired with a love for sensual touch.

Sensual touch includes all non-sexual touch – hugs, holding hands, cuddles, snuggles, massage and kisses.

People are all wired differently and everyone has their preference in how they love to be loved. Mastering the Intellectual Pathway enables us to find out how our spouse loves to be loved. When it comes to physical touch – Alanna's preference is sensual.

Like I said – I love the sensual, but personally, I think everything is best when it ends in sex.

What a predicament.

When things were out of balance for us and I was a desperate love leech I would offer Alanna massages with the hope that it would put her in the mood for sex. When it didn't, I would sulk and punish her with an unsafe atmosphere.

That made for a bad night for both of us...

It would usually go from bad to worse as it led to another re-run of the same dead-end conversation that we'd had countless times before, which usually ended in tears for Alanna and complete frustration for me. Finally I would sprinkle it with a little more sulking and we would go to sleep exhausted and way later than we planned, both feeling terrible. I obviously let Alanna know that if we were just having sex, all of this would be avoided, but she just didn't get it.

At this point in our lives the pressure on our marriage was really intense. Little kids, sleepless nights, breast feeding, me being desperate all the time, finances, Alanna not getting the sensual touch she wanted, unsafe atmospheres, intense emotions, physical exhaustion, identity issues, Alanna missing her family – it was all just building into one continuous struggle.

It took a good 2-hour counselling session and a lot more tears to help me clearly understand that Alanna just wanted sensual touch without any sexual agendas.

It was obvious what I wanted.

This was when I began discovering what Alanna wanted, when she wanted it and how she liked it.

Our counsellor recommended that we schedule sex nights and sensual nights. On the sensual nights – I was supposed to love on Alanna and just give her what she wanted and how she liked it.

On the sex nights... we will talk more about that in the Sexual Pathway.

As I've shared previously – we stumbled our way through this process. Our promise became a fake agreement and we broke our promises to each other over and over. It probably made things in our relationship worse initially.

There was nothing wrong with the counsellor's advice – it was our application that failed. This went on for a year or so... then we had another session with the counsellor. We identified our fake agreements. We tried again.

This time we actually implemented the advice. It was around this time that I had my “awakening” and began to take extreme ownership for all the mess that I didn't realise I was creating in our marriage.

Alanna started getting her sensual needs met.

Pressure started coming off on multiple fronts. Over time we built back trust. We created a new culture in our marriage of sensual touch. After a couple of years we stopped the scheduled nights as things began to take on a more organic rhythm. We regularly have nights that are exclusively devoted to Alanna's need for sensual touch. Her preference is usually a full body oil massage followed by going directly to sleep.

She loves it! I love that she loves it! We both know that I'd love a happy ending – but those nights aren't about me. They're about her. So I do something that's hard for me and I don't initiate sex. I just let her drift peacefully to sleep.

Obviously sometimes she just can't resist my awesome manliness and she's all over me... or maybe that's just in my imagination? I'll have to clarify that when we talk about the Sexual Pathway.

Other people who have been through our 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy training have shared that they have exactly the same challenge. Also, it's not only ladies that are hardwired with a love for sensual touch over sexual touch. Each person is uniquely wired and it's our role to discover how our spouse loves to be loved and to generously meet their needs, wants, dreams and desires.

This part of our story is a great example of Les Brown's quote: "If you do what is easy your life will be hard. If you do what is hard your life will become easy."

When it comes to choosing, which hard I would prefer, it's a no brainer.

Would I prefer the hard times we use to have in our chaos days or would I prefer the hard option of exercising some self-control and letting Alanna drift to sleep without hassling her for sex after a full body oil massage?

I am consistently choosing the hard option of self-control. Because continually choosing that hard, has allowed us to completely re-design our marriage into something more beautiful than we had imagined possible.

ALANNA

For me, it wasn't that I needed sensual touch, it was that I didn't want sexual touch. Because Benji's equation was touch=sex it meant that I avoided all touch at all cost. If I held his hand or put my hand on his shoulder, he thought he was going to get lucky that night. My equation became no touch=no sex. That's a very toxic mix of equations as we were both miserable and disconnected in this area.

When we discovered sensual touch, I learnt that there was a 'safe' and enjoyable form of touch, without pressure, and from safe touch could come sexual touch, as trust was rebuilt. This was actually quite revolutionary for us, especially as touch is Benji's main love language.

Regardless of your love language, is there a way you can create a safe behaviour from something unsafe, and from that nurture your trust and rebuild broken bridges?

Benji said to me the other day that he didn't think I had actually changed that much, and I agreed. Touch is where some of the main pressure on our marriage came through (the other two areas were our location and lack of money). When the pressure on this relaxed, it relaxed across the other areas a bit too.

Benji is the one who did most of the work in this area (the things I had been saying all along were finally being heard!) and because of his hard work we are both a lot better off.

As the pressure on me eased off, and his understanding of what kind of touch was safe and fun for me, he has reaped the rewards and has a much more fulfilled sex life, and life in general.

We also have much better communication; I will ask what his expectations are and we are both ok with whatever reply, or he tells me straight up, which is helpful for me. Our trust has been completely rebuilt in this area.

In the past there were times I wondered if we would ever get past it. It felt truly hopeless for several years. I am so pleased that is behind us now, and we often remark to each other that marriage gets better every year. Every year is better than the last, imagine how good it will be next year!

Chapter 8

Sacred Pathway Number 5

The Financial Pathway

The Financial Pathway Determines Whether Or Not Money Will Be Your Servant Or Your Master.

One of the biggest curses around the world and one of the biggest issues that Christian missionaries are constantly contending with is poverty. Poverty is a curse. It definitely caused chaos in our lives. Our problem was not that money was an evil entity that was conspiring against us. Our problem was our relationship with money.

When you don't have much money, money dictates a lot of what you can and cannot do. We had a tiny amount of income. We had credit card debt to help us cover the weekly deficit on our bills. We never knew how we were going to pay it off. We didn't always know how we were going to pay for simple things like food.

I had lived by faith for years pursuing the call of God full time with no income and trusting God for every need before we got married and we continued like that for the first few years of our marriage. We always saw God doing amazing things with money. We experienced the provision of God for all our needs.

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:19 ESV

When we had no money and no idea how we were going to pay our bills I definitely spent a lot of time thinking about how we would be able to raise funds just for living costs. We saw God provide for all manner of ministry and mission projects. We understood principles of faith, breakthrough and generosity. But we did not understand the Biblical principles or wisdom around money in our early days.

A good friend of ours, Bruce McDonald, who stewards tens of millions of dollars for the Kingdom of God gave us some great pointers on money. Here's one of his quotes on money:

“Money is a terrible master but a wonderful servant.”

Bruce teaches a lot on the Biblical Finances. Did you know that the Bible has over 2,000 verses on the topic of money? The Bible actually talks about money far more than it talks about prayer. Biblical wisdom on how to steward finances went a really long way in our world.

One of Bruce's foundational messages is that there are 4 purposes for money: saving, spending, giving and investing. Growing up in the church we heard a lot about giving. We knew about saving and we were good at spending. The biggest learning curve for us was the concept of investing and turning money into our servant, so that it wasn't always our master.

As a couple we have generally been in the same headspace around money and our main issues with money were when we had none. So learning about money and going on a journey of discovery around money was a great learning curve for us.

Another teaching that we came across that was a huge blessing for us was “The 5 Jars” principle. This is a Jewish financial principle that they teach to their kids. The 5 jars principle is a blueprint for how to steward your money, which is one of the secrets behind Jewish people being disproportionately wealthy.

Here's "The 5 Jars" principle that Jewish dads teach to their kids so they can learn to steward wealth from a young age. When you get your money, you put 10% into your tithing jar. You put 10% into your offering/giving jar. You put 10% into your savings jar. You put 20% into your investing jar and you put 50% into your spending jar.

- Tithing 10%
- Offering 10%
- Saving 10%
- Investing 20%
- Spending 50%

When we first heard this it was a radical concept. We were already giving around 20% so that wasn't a shock. But we weren't saving very much, our only investment was our house, we had no investment that created cashflow and instead of living off 50% we could barely live off the 80%.

It's hard to live on 100% of not much, but it's easy to live off 50% of a lot. We've been teaching this to our kids since they were tiny, as a result they have all been able to create residual income streams at ages 4, 6 and 8. We help them, coach them and talk them through the process. But they are all making money through automated income streams. We are excited to change the culture around finances for our family and for generations to come.

We began to make incremental changes. Just little ones. We started saving a little more. Then we started investing small amounts of our savings. Slowly our investments started creating more cashflow. Little by little, we were able to turn the tide on finances by applying simple Biblical wisdom. It was a hard thing for us. It took us out of our comfort zone. We had to learn a lot about business. We started several ventures and began creating multiple income streams.

King Solomon had a lot to say about Biblical wisdom in his writings, here's one of his thoughts.

² “Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.”

ECCLESIASTES 11:2 NIV

This really was a new concept to us. But we embraced it. It took years for us to change our relationship with money. But little by little the change came and it has taken a huge amount of pressure off our marriage. We definitely agree with Bruce that “money is a terrible master but a wonderful servant.”

Our money pressure came from not having much money. But any couple can have money issues, whether they have a lot of money or a little.

HERE'S 5 OF THE TOP MONEY ISSUES THAT WE'VE SEEN IMPACT MARRIAGES

POVERTY

This was us. Poverty adds stress to a relationship, it dictates your lifestyle, it controls your resources and it controls the amount of time that you have available to spend with your spouse, especially if you always have to work. Poverty restricts your ability to be present, to serve others, to live your dreams and to serve God.

GREED

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

1 TIMONTHY 6:10 NIV

It's important to note that when Paul wrote to Timothy he did not say that money was the root of all evil. He said that the love of money was the root of all evil. He is talking about greed. Greed in a marriage is like a cancer. It doesn't just impact the finances. Greed cripples the entire flow of love in a relationship. Greed is evidence of a love deficit.

A healthy marriage depends on wholehearted extravagant generosity in all areas. Greed in the area of finances or anywhere else is deadly to a marriage.

STEWARDSHIP

Poor stewardship of finances could come from a lack of wisdom, it could come from an addiction, it could come from any number of areas, but it all produces the same results – broken trust and wasted resources. Healthy boundaries will be needed and possible mediation if there is broken trust, especially if it is connected to an addiction.

CONTROL

A controlling person will want to control the money in a relationship and depending on how controlling they are, they may also want to control their spouse through the finances. A controlling person will not usually consider themselves as controlling. They may justify it saying they are the best steward. Create a safe place and ask your spouse if they think you are controlling in finances or any of the other areas of your marriage.

If you aren't willing to have that conversation and take on board their feedback – it may be time to see a counsellor to talk that through.

PERSONALITY

Our individual wiring also impacts how we think about finances. Personality influences our perspectives on the best way to save, to give, to spend and to invest. Is your spouse a risk taker or not a risk taker? Are they a spender or a saver? Are they a giver or an investor?

ALANNA

I found having no money incredibly hard and stressful. Much harder than Benji I think. I always loved being very generous with any money I had as I'm a gift giver by nature.

I was the one in charge of physically paying the bills. I could see them piling up and having no idea how we were going to pay them. Did I pay the power this week or did we eat? The constant juggle was exhausting.

Last year Benji took over a bit more of this side of things, which has reduced stress for me too. I know the amount left over for food and other bits and bobs and that's much less stressful than having all the bills in my inbox and having to pay them.

We saw God meet our needs in amazing, humbling ways; food parcels left on our doorstep or money in the letterbox, people buying us the things we needed or family providing for us. While I loved seeing the way God provided I found it really stressful living like that year after year.

When I first heard these financial principles, I wondered how we could divide -\$0. We started little by little and, while we still aren't exactly where we want to be, we have the basic principles in place to get there and to pass it on to our children. The financial training I had (or at least the only thing I remember) was 'don't go into debt for anything but your house', which I'm really thankful that was drilled into me, but there's so much more that I would have found helpful.

One thing we used to do, which I loved, was tithe before the need was met. God met our need every time. If we needed food, we would take the last item from the freezer and give it to someone else in need, if it was money for ministry, we would take the little we had saved and give it all away with great joy.

I know that probably seems counter intuitive to some but it worked for us. It was scary sometimes too. But every time it was met with a greater measure returned.

Jesus's 3 Phase Financial Training That Will Help You Master The Financial Pathway

Not many people realise that Jesus actually taught us 3 phases of Kingdom economics. They are: alignment, assignment and reformation. If we apply ourselves to understanding and implementing the 3 phases of Kingdom economics money will become a servant that blesses our marriage, not a curse that tears it apart.

PHASE 1:

ECONOMIC ALIGNMENT

In Matthew 6:24 NIV Jesus said:

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

You cannot serve both God and money because you are called to serve God and to rule over money.

Money is not your friend or your enemy... money is neutral, the issue in our relationship with money is us, not the money. In His “3 Phase Kingdom Economic Training” Jesus taught us how to be free from the 2 ways that we can enslave ourselves to money.

In Jesus’s first phase of training on Kingdom economics He revealed the first way that we can enslave ourselves to money and how to avoid this trap.

The first way that we can enslave ourselves to money is by allowing money to become an idol. We’ve talked already about beliefs systems and how we behave according to what we believe. It’s the same in our relationship with money and the key is the value that we place on money. Money becomes an idol when we place a higher value on money than we do on God or walking in total surrender and radical obedience to Jesus.

Jesus asked people to make big financial sacrifices in order to reveal the idolatry in their hearts that was rooted in placing a higher value on money than on God or obedience to God.

If we would compromise our relationship with God for the sake of money, then the way we think about money is ruling over us. The highway to freedom from this is maintaining a pure heart and a pure mind that ascribes the correct value to money.

Being enslaved to money in the way we think, produces greed, pride, idolatry, poverty and rebellion. Our value for money can then begin to control our thoughts, feelings, motivations and actions.

Jesus wants us to walk in purity of heart and mind because only a pure heart and mind can rule over money. If our heart, mind and relationship with money is out of alignment with God's values it doesn't matter how much money we have, whether a little or a lot – our twisted love of money will cause us to become a slave to money in the way that we think.

It is during Phase 1 of His teaching that we hear Jesus speaking on all these verses related to purity of heart and mind in our relationship with money:

“Seek first His Kingdom”, “blessed are the poor”, “do not store up for yourselves treasures”, “no one can serve two masters”, “sell your possessions, give to the needy”, “life does not consist of the abundance of possessions”, “what does it profit a man to gain the whole world but to forfeit his own soul”, “it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God”, “be on your guard against all covetousness”, “out of her poverty, put in all she had to live on”, “if you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor”.

4 LESSONS

4 Lessons that we should learn from these verses on maintaining a pure heart and mind in our relationship with money are:

1. Don't let money become an idol by putting more value on money than you put on your relationship with God.
2. You can't take your money with you when you die, so use it to create a legacy that expands the Kingdom of God, and produces a Heavenly return.
- 3 God loves extreme generosity.
- 4 God is always thinking about the poor and how to help them break free from their poverty.

3 MONEY TRAPS TO AVOID

In His Phase 1 economic training Jesus highlighted 3 common money traps for us to avoid:

1: Don't Lose Sight of Eternity

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

MATTHEW 6:33 NIV

In the midst of all the day-to-day hustle and grind and all our financial planning – Jesus wants to make sure that we never lose sight of the fact that we can't take our money into Heaven. He teaches us to steward all our finances with an eternal focus. This looks like walking in purity of heart and mind in our relationship with money and always ensuring that obedience to Jesus is our first financial priority.

Jesus doesn't just want to be your saviour, He wants to be your Lord. Walking in purity of heart and mind in our relationship with money looks like Jesus having leadership over our financial decisions.

2: Don't Let Money Become an Idol....

In Mark 10 Jesus has a famous conversation with a rich young ruler. One of the first financial issues that Jesus highlights with the young man is how he has allowed money to become an idol in his life that has a higher priority to him than relationship with and obedience to God.

²¹“Looking at him, Jesus showed love to him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” ²² But he was deeply dismayed by these words, and he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.”

MARK 10:21-22 NASB

If there is any area in our lives that we have allowed to become an idol that has more value to us than walking in obedience to God – that will be the price that Jesus will require of us. Jesus knows that to walk in full freedom, we must walk in full obedience and full surrender. In this conversation with the rich young ruler Jesus used money to reveal where his heart was really at.

What became obvious very quickly was that this young man had made money an idol that he valued more than following Jesus. Although he was very wealthy, he was still a slave to money. Because his values and priorities were out of alignment, he was not walking in purity of heart and mind and money had become his master.

3: Don't Take Your Identity From Your Wealth

Whether you have a lot of money or a little bit of money, Jesus wants us taking our identity from Him and not our bank account. After His conversation with the rich young ruler Jesus continued talking about money and began dealing with the issue of people taking identity from their wealth.

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

MARK 10:25 NIV

“The eye of the needle” was a narrow gate into Jerusalem. To get through the “eye of the needle” camels had to kneel down and unload their possessions. The issue that Jesus was addressing here is that people had bound their values and their identity to their wealth and if they wanted to step into the freedom offered in the Kingdom of God, they would have to let go of and unload their false beliefs, their pride and their false definitions of their identity attached to their financial status.

They would have to detach from the lies and lay them down, in the same way that a loaded camel would have to have its load detached and laid down on the ground so that the camel could pass through the “eye of the needle”.

The objective of Jesus's phase 1 training on Kingdom economics is purity of heart and mind. We can be enslaved in our thinking about money, whether we have a little or a lot if our value of money is not in alignment with Jesus's value of money.

PHASE 2

ECONOMIC ASSIGNMENT

Remember in Matthew 6:24 NIV Jesus said:

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

We cannot serve both God and money because we are called to serve God and rule over money. Most of what Jesus taught us about money was helping us to first ensure that money did not rule over us by corrupting our hearts and minds.

But after chapter 25 in Matthew Jesus stops dealing with “Economic Alignment” and shifts to the second phase of His training teaching us about the sacred “Economic Assignment” that is on our lives.

It’s the same in the book of Luke. After Luke 19 Jesus shifts focus onto His second phase of financial training “Economic Assignment”. Most people are not taught that God has placed a sacred economic assignment on our lives and He is testing each one of us in the area of how we steward our finances.

Jesus wants us to rule and reign over money in 2 ways. He wants us to have pure hearts and minds so that the way we think about money does not control our feelings, emotions, motivations and actions. He also wants us to steward wealth with Biblical wisdom so that finances do not control our time and resources. Jesus wants us to be free in all areas of our lives.

In the second phase of His training on Kingdom economics, Jesus focused not on the purity of our hearts and minds, but on the wisdom of our principles and systems.

The second way we can become money's slaves is if money controls our time and resources. In order to become money's master and get free from money controlling our time and resources we must apply Biblical systems and principles.

Let's jump into a couple of parables where Jesus taught about our "Economic Assignment".

Firstly let's look at:

MATTHEW 25 NIV

– The parable of talents. First, a little context – these servants are all about to be given bags full of gold! A talent was 18 kilograms of gold, about 20 years' worth of wages.

¹⁴ "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

One of the first things that we need to notice here is that this whole parable is highlighting an investor's mindset where the money is making money. There are 4 investors in this story. The first investor is the owner of the gold. He makes three investments into three servants commissioning each of his servants to become investors.

Then he goes on his journey with the expectation that while he is away doing his thing – his money will be making money for him. It's important to note that he gave the servants a long time to produce a return. Time and money are two of the most important elements to investing.

The next thing to note is that the first servant grew in favour with the master, based on how he stewarded the sacred financial assignment on his life. By the way, growing in favour with God does not mean that God loves you more, but it does mean that you will have greater access to Kingdom resources.

²² “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

The second servant also produces a great return on the investment for his master and grows in favour and is rewarded for successfully stewarding the sacred financial assignment on his life.

²⁴ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ ““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS MATTHEW 25: 14-28 NIV

This third servant is very relevant to us. The third servant recognised that his master had an investor's mindset ‘harvesting where you have not sown’. That investing mindset made the third servant scared. He recognised that the master was a risk taker with his money. But the thought of financial risk paralysed the servant.

He didn’t lose the master's money. The master was most upset with the servant because the servant did not understand that principles of investing, which is that you use money to make money. That’s why he talked to the servant about the safe option. You could have at least put the money in the bank?

The big issue for this servant was that the servant did not understand the principles and systems of investing. That’s why the master said that the servant was wicked and lazy. He expected that if the servant didn’t understand how to invest, then he would take his sacred financial assignment seriously enough to go out and learn and then do something brilliant with the assignment entrusted to him. Instead the servant did nothing.

Jesus takes the sacred financial assignment on our lives seriously. We are being tested with our money. It's not about the amount – it's about stewardship. We are being tested for faithfulness and how well we implement the principles and systems of Kingdom economics.

LUKE 19

THE PARABLE OF THE MINAS

A mina was much less than a talent, it was about 4 months wages.

¹¹ “While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.¹² He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.

¹³ So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’

Here we are seeing again the investor mindset of money making money for you and also receiving a sacred financial assignment.

¹⁴ “But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’¹⁵ “He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

¹⁶ “The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’¹⁷ “‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’”

The master was very interested to know how the servants had stewarded their sacred financial assignment. It's interesting to see that the master used the sacred financial assignment on their lives to determine how much influence and favour to bestow on their lives.

This is the same principle that we saw in the parable of the talents. Faithfully stewarding a sacred economic assignment produces an increase in favour.

This is where it gets really powerful and we see the bigger picture of why Jesus is testing us with finances – Jesus is looking for people that He can entrust greater favour and influence to. Favour, dominion and authority are a reward for stewarding our finances well.

18 “The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’

At this point the man has just gone into profit. He gave out 10 minas, he went on an adventure and now he has 15 minas. His money was making money for him.

19 “His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’

20 “Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. 21 I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’ ”

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN MINAS

LUKE 19: 11-21 NIV

Again we see the investor mindset here...we don't hear about the other 7 servants who were commissioned to invest on the master's behalf, but even if they all lost the money, he is in profit with the capital and returns from these three investments. He started with ten minas and now has 16 minas and he didn't lift a finger for it. It was all money making money for him. This is an example of how we rule over money through principles and systems.

Jesus is giving us a very clear picture of how to walk in financial freedom by stewarding our financial assignment. He is creating an investment mindset and an investment culture. For Jewish people this is their normal. That's why Jewish people are disproportionately wealthy. They have an investment culture that produces multigenerational wealth.

Remember "The 5 Jars" principle?

- 10% tithe
- 10% offering
- 10% save
- 20% investments
- 50% living

Re-capping Phase 1 and 2: In Phase 1 Jesus teaches us to rule over money through purity of our hearts and minds. In Phase 2 Jesus teaches us to rule over money through the wisdom of Biblical principles and systems. One interesting thought is that if churches taught financial wisdom like Jewish people do, based on the same Old Testament scriptures, the church would teach investing twice as much as it teaches tithing. Perhaps then Christians and Jewish people would both be disproportionately wealthy because of Biblical financial wisdom.

PHASE 3

ECONOMIC REFORMATION

Phase 3 of Jesus's training is "Economic Reformation" and this is so much fun.

Phase 3 is about using your wisdom and money to expand the Kingdom of God on Earth as in Heaven. Firstly it's about sharing what Jesus taught so that people can be free from poverty mindsets and slavery to money in the way they think. Secondly it's about empowering people to rule and reign over money through Biblical wisdom, principles, systems and creating practical opportunities for people to get free from poverty.

Let me tell you a story about Mr. Francis from Pakistan. Mr. Francis was a brick kiln slave in Pakistan... he and his family worked all day, dawn till dusk making bricks with no holidays or hope that this would ever change...

Without an economic miracle – he would be trapped there for the rest of his life, like multitudes of others including his whole family...

Our church helped him start a catering business and got him out of slavery.

He poured his heart out into his new catering business and then...

...this is one of the most touching stories that I've heard in my whole life: He was able to buy his own wife out of slavery...

That is beyond my comprehension! Imagine being Mr. Francis and buying your own wife out of slavery. That overwhelms me every time.

He then proceeded to buy his whole family and extended family out of slavery... On top of this his business is also funding life transforming ministries in his area.

If it was not for the investor mindset, Mr. Francis, his wife and his family would still all be making bricks dawn till dusk to this day.

This is what “Economic Reformation” looks like on a small scale. On a larger scale, as hundreds of millions of Christians all over the world start embracing Jesus’s “3 Phase Economic Training”, it will look like this:

19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:19-20 NIV

Phase 3 of Jesus’s training on Kingdom economics is all about discipling nations. As we steward and share what is in our hands it creates a ripple effect that impacts lives.

OUR CHALLENGE

This is our Challenge to you.

Take a look at your heart, your mind and how you are stewarding your finances as a couple. Is there room anywhere, in how you value money, in your relationship with money, in how you make money, or in how you steward money to make a 1-degree shift?

Is there room for a 1-degree shift in how you spend, give, save or invest your money?

If so, we encourage you to make an incremental sustainable change in your relationship to and stewardship of money together as a couple. That's how change began for us. Little by little.

Vulnerable Communication and Generous Negotiation.

All of “The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy” require us to wholeheartedly embrace vulnerable communication and generous negotiation. It's time to go deep with each other to discover your spouse's needs, wants, dreams and desires in the area of finances.

For some couples this is an area of great pain, for others it's an area of great celebration – wherever you are at, mastering the Financial Pathway places a demand on us to open up our hearts and go deep with one another into the intricacies of our most personal hopes, wounds, fears and desires. Our spouses need excellent information from us communicated in a safe way that helps them to understand exactly what we are thinking and feeling in regards to our relationship with and stewardship of money.

As you talk it through, begin to build a picture, a vision for the future that you want to create together in the area of finances, then begin making your 1 degree shifts towards the better brighter future that you are dreaming of. Remember, when you dance through this delicate area of each other's lives – be safe, be vulnerable, give great information and be generous negotiators.

Chapter 9

Sacred Pathway Number 6

The Leadership Pathway

“Leadership is influence. Nothing more. Nothing less.”

John C Maxwell

Your level of leadership in your relationship is determined by your level of influence. Your style of leadership is determined by how you gain influence. The Leadership Pathway is the pathway of influence.

This is a pathway fraught with many temptations and dangers that can destroy a relationship. This is the pathway where power struggles, manipulation and control all emerge in the ultimate quest for influence.

The Leadership Pathway sets the tone for your whole relationship because it determines how every decision is made, who makes every decision, how much ownership you both have for your decisions and how you feel about every decision that is made. It determines whether your decisions really are mutual or if they are fake agreements.

How do you decide what happens in the spiritual pathway in your relationship? How do you decide how you will communicate or do conflict resolution? How do you decide where you go on holiday? How do you decide who gets a massage? How do you decide how to steward your money? How do you decide where you will live? How do you decide what you will do? How do you decide on your vision? How do you decide on what food you will eat or what car you will drive? How do you decide if you will have kids, adopt kids or how many you will have – if any? How do you decide what happens or what doesn't happen in your sex life?

The Leadership Pathway influences every aspect of your relationship. It establishes your vision, where you are going and how you are getting there and it impacts every single decision that you make as a couple. It determines whether or not decision making is a violating act of domination, an exciting collaboration or a relentless battle for control.

WHO WEARS THE PANTS?

I keep telling Alanna that in an ideal relationship there are no pants. She says that in an ideal relationship - leadership, influence and decision making - are a mutual dance founded on safe atmospheres, trust, vulnerable communication, good information and generous negotiation.

ALANNA

Benji, please keep your pants on!

Now this works perfectly as long as you have two powerful people in the relationship. But if one or both people are restricted in their ability to be a powerful person, things can start to get messy as couples wrestle for the pants and for influence instead of sharing them nicely.

There are 3 classic power structures in relationships. The *co-dependent relationship*, the *power struggle relationship* or the *powerful people relationship*. Let's check them out and while we do, why don't you explore where your relationship is and where you want it to be?

You may find that one of these examples matches exactly where you are at, it may be a combination of all of them or somewhere in between – the big question is what do you want for your future?

POWERFUL PEOPLE

When some people hear the word power, they associate it with danger. Let me redefine for you what a truly powerful person is like. A truly powerful person is secure in their identity.

Powerful people have gone on a spiritual journey and become securely established in their identity. They don't have leaky love tanks and they are deeply connected to God's love as their source, they live with an abundance of love and they are ready to overflow love abundantly into others. They have laid the foundation for healthy emotions and behaviours, which has empowered them to consistently create safe atmospheres, build trust, communicate vulnerably, provide people with great information and negotiate generously.

As a result they experience the very finest quality of intimacy possible in many healthy relationships at the same time. At work, in the community, at church, at home and with their spouse they are constantly creating beautiful, rich and deeply connected relationships with healthy boundaries.

They definitely experience unsafe people, but they quickly establish healthy boundaries to ensure that unsafe people have no power to control them or create chaos in their lives.

Powerful people do not manipulate or control.

Powerful people are secure people.

Powerful people create safe atmospheres.

Powerful people are trustworthy people.

Powerful people are vulnerable people.

Powerful people have healthy boundaries.

Powerful people are generous people.

It takes 2 powerful people to create the most intimate, extravagant, luxurious, satisfying and lit up love lives possible. The journey to becoming a powerful person is never easy but the reward is the pearl of great price. The reward is the type of relationship where both people receive what they want, when they want it and how they like it. The reward is that both people have their most personal and intimate needs, wants, dreams and desires consistently and abundantly satisfied.

When 2 powerful people are in a relationship there is no manipulation or control. However, powerless people are always trying to snatch the pants and whatever levels of control they can, through any means necessary. Powerless people make demands. Powerless people sulk. Powerless people manipulate. Powerless people don't compromise. Powerless people demand more influence than the level of trust in their relationship deserves.

Powerful people celebrate each other's sovereignty and free choice. When powerful people have to navigate difficult decisions or conversations they do so courageously, vulnerably, compassionately and with a heart to understand not to persuade. For powerful people the process is more important than the outcome and collateral damage is not an acceptable loss.

They are gentle with each other and take the time needed to reach the best decision. They negotiate generously where needed, without hiding their thoughts, feelings, wants or needs in the process.

Powerless people lead and influence through manipulation, force and control.

Powerful people operate completely differently. They actively seek out the desires of their partner and from a place of trust and wilful submission they give themselves to serve the desires of their lover.

Nothing can taste sweeter than when your spouse tenderly devotes themselves to satisfying your needs, wants, dreams and desires, except perhaps the privilege of knowing that this love and service of one another's heart's desires is completely mutual.

The intimate dance of receiving and expressing extravagant love has no comparison.

In the economy of powerful people, trust opens the door to wilful submission and the honour of leadership becomes a beautiful dance of serving and being served in the context of love and generosity.

The first step to leadership is servanthood.

John C Maxwell

CO-DEPENDANT RELATIONSHIPS

When we have our understanding of power corrupted, we are in danger of being caught in a co-dependant or power struggle relationship. Until we rediscover our power and how to function as a powerful person, we will not be able to maintain a healthy intimate relationship.

The root cause of someone losing their power is almost always spiritual.

Here's how it typically plays out:

A person goes through a traumatic experience and believes a lie about themselves. That lie could be, "I'm inadequate and unworthy". Then on the foundation of that lie comes another lie, "Because I'm inadequate and unworthy, what I have to say is not important". Then on top of that lie comes another lie, "Because what I have to say is not important, it's best if I keep my thoughts to myself". On top of that lie comes another lie, "Because it's best that I keep my thoughts to myself, I should let other people make my decisions for me".

That person is positioned to become passive-aggressive. A passive-aggressive person says yes to every idea, because they feel like they aren't worthy to have a voice or make decisions. So, they say yes and let everyone else make their decisions for them.

But secretly a passive-aggressive person starts to resent people for controlling them all the time.

When we go on a beautiful journey from an "Orphan Identity" into "Sonship", we remove the foundational lies and substitute those lies with the truth that says, "I am worthy, I am loved, I am made perfectly in the image of God, I am worthy of love and honour".

When we replace these foundational lies about our identity the other lies that were built on top of those lies begin to effortlessly crumble away and we can begin to grow from being a person whose power is restricted to becoming the powerful person God created us to be.

A person with restricted power is prone to giving up their own power, or struggling to express their power or believing that acting powerfully will drive people away from them. Someone struggling with being a powerful person is more likely to submit themselves to other people's wants, needs or preferences without regard for themselves or for healthy boundaries.

They would find it difficult to make decisions and take independent action. Their perception of clearly communicating their wants and needs is that they are being mean and demanding.

They can lose themselves in the relationship because they are always focused on the other person's needs, wants, dreams and desires. Fear of rejection and abandonment is often a strong motivation and they have a strong need for other people's approval. Their expectations can often be unrealistic and they generally carry a reactive, victim mindset.

Someone with restricted power issues has a high chance of ending up in a co-dependant relationship.

A co-dependent relationship is a relationship with a power imbalance. One partner is the submissive, passive-aggressive person with restricted power issues, the other partner is an unsafe domineering person who is comfortable with letting their excessive levels of control fill the power vacuum. The dominant partner could be an addict, a narcissist, an abuser or someone with a strong need for control.

The submissive partner usually utilises passive-aggressive tactics like withholding vulnerable information or affection. It's possible for the submissive partner to develop depression or physical health issues as direct symptoms of their restricted power and the power imbalance in their relationship.

POWER STRUGGLE

Other couples get caught in the middle, they aren't in a co-dependant relationship but they also haven't learnt to be powerful people who are secure in their identities, who create safe atmospheres, build trust, give vulnerable information and negotiate generously.

Instead, they are caught in a constant power struggle, where both spouses are constantly using all sorts of tactics, strategies and manipulation to gain influence, control and leadership in the relationship. They may sometimes choose to negotiate, but it does not usually end up with a beautiful power sharing dynamic, it tends to result more in a territorial debate, that typically results in compromising to allow each other "domains", where they alone have the power and complete control.

Here are 7 early symptoms of an emerging power struggle:

1. Both people are strong and have similar personalities.
2. The goal of your conversations is persuasion rather than understanding each other's hearts.
3. Not only is generous negotiation not happening, but it's also hard work just to come to a small compromise.
4. Listening is not a priority. People jump to conclusions and false assumptions, which leads to a lack of good information.
5. There is a jostling happening when it comes to who will take the leadership role in projects, conversations and decision making.

6. There are accusations and long memories of mistakes that are used to justify why one person should have the right to make the decisions and the other should let them lead.
7. You are happy to sacrifice your spouse's feelings to get what you want, but you justify it by saying this is the best option. The outcome becomes more important than the process and collateral damage is an acceptable loss.

MANIPULATION AND CONTROL

The sacred gift of mutual wilful submission is one of the most priceless treasures that any couple can ever share. It is an exquisite dance that only 2 powerful lovers can enjoy. Like any treasure, it is of great value. Powerless people look at it like someone with no money looks at the highest quality diamonds through a jeweller's shop window.

Instead of going and doing the hard work required to be able to afford such a treasure, powerless people often snatch it selfishly by force, only to find that influence that comes through manipulation and control is a worthless counterfeit that has no satisfaction, rather it produces a bitter aftertaste.

⁶“So Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. And when the king came to see him, Amnon asked him, “Please let my sister Tamar come and cook my favourite dish as I watch. Then I can eat it from her own hands.” ⁷ So David agreed and sent Tamar to Amnon's house to prepare some food for him.

⁸ When Tamar arrived at Amnon's house, she went to the place where he was lying down so he could watch her mix some dough. Then she baked his favourite dish for him. ⁹ But when she set the serving tray before him, he refused to eat. “Everyone get out of here,” Amnon told his servants. So they all left.

¹⁰ Then he said to Tamar, “Now bring the food into my bedroom and feed it to me here.” So Tamar took his favourite dish to him. ¹¹ But as she was feeding him, he grabbed her and demanded, “Come to bed with me, my darling sister.”

¹² “No, my brother!” she cried. “Don’t be foolish! Don’t do this to me! Such wicked things aren’t done in Israel. ¹³ Where could I go in my shame? And you would be called one of the greatest fools in Israel. Please, just speak to the king about it, and he will let you marry me.”

¹⁴ But Amnon wouldn’t listen to her, and since he was stronger than she was, he raped her. ¹⁵ Then suddenly Amnon’s love turned to hate, and he hated her even more than he had loved her. “Get out of here!” he snarled at her.

¹⁶ “No, no!” Tamar cried. “Sending me away now is worse than what you’ve already done to me.”

But Amnon wouldn’t listen to her. ¹⁷ He shouted for his servant and demanded, “Throw this woman out, and lock the door behind her!”

2 SAMUEL 13:6-15 NLT

Amnon is a classic example of a powerless person using force, manipulation and control to try and seize a treasure that he could not afford. Anytime we use manipulation and control, we are behaving in the same spirit as Amnon and it has far reaching consequences.

If we truly want to possess the treasure of intimacy, if we want the real thing, we have to go out and earn it.

FINDING YOUR WAY HOME

The solution for your relationship is for both of you to become powerful people. But you can't control your partner, so you only get to choose whether or not you will become a powerful person.

There are two non-negotiable requirements if you want to become a powerful person.

Step 1 is taking extreme ownership for where you are at personally. You are going to have to take ownership for the fact that your beliefs, your values, your skill sets and your decision-making processes are at least part of the reason for why you are where you are and why you feel how you feel.

You cannot move forward in your relationship with a narcissistic victim mentality like I had. Constantly blaming your partner will not produce transformation in your relationship. You have to own your beliefs, your feelings, your attitude, your actions, your atmosphere, your boundaries and your leadership style.

Step 1 is you have to own it.

Step 2 is you have to want change badly enough to do hard things.

Co-dependant and power struggle relationships are excruciatingly painful and difficult to navigate. You are going to have to choose your hard. Do you want to pay the price of living in a dysfunctional relationship or do you want to pay the price of becoming a powerful person?

Becoming a powerful person is going to start with discovering your identity and going on a beautiful journey into Sonship. Becoming a powerful person is going to require you to apply yourself to mastering “The 7 Sacred Pathways to Intimacy. Becoming a powerful person is going to require you to develop relationship and leadership skills.

You are going to have to make a decision. Do you want a dysfunctional relationship for as long as it can last or do you want to step into the intimacy and divine romance that God designed you for?

If you want the type of intimacy that satisfies your deepest desires and wildest dreams – it’s possible. But it starts with choosing your hard. Do you want it enough to break the cycles that you are in and to start embracing the hard tasks necessary to produce change?

Redesigning your relationship will require you to become a powerful person. Becoming a powerful person requires doing hard things.

Are you ready to choose your hard?

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Even two powerful people can experience challenges in the process of decision making together. Studying the art of leadership can give you great insights into the best ways to steward the influence that you have in your relationship.

Here is one lesson that I've found very helpful.

When I left home, I pursued my passion for the outdoors and I did a two year course called "The Advanced Certificate in Leadership and Guiding". It was just what I needed at that time in my life – a huge world of adventure. I trained in rock climbing, mountaineering, snowboarding, white water rafting, white water kayaking, ice climbing, sea kayaking and tramping.

60% of the course was practical, which meant a relentless cycle of world class adventures for two years. I loved the theory side of the training too, especially our studies on leadership. Something particularly interesting that we looked at was "The Spectrum of Leadership".

"The Spectrum of Leadership" is a training that was developed to help people match the right leadership style with the right situation. There is a time when a "Command and Control/Dictator" leadership style is exactly what you need, there is a time for rigorous collaboration and democratic processes and there are times when no leadership is required at all.

As outdoor guides and especially as raft guides, if someone was trapped under water, we needed to be able to switch instantly into the command-and-control leadership style and take urgent emergency action. But at night, kicking back around a campfire with guitars and marshmallows, no leadership style was necessary as we all enjoyed chilling, eating and enjoying ourselves. Around breakfast, planning how far we would aim to push before lunch, was the perfect time to collaborate and make a democratic decision.

In the right situation, each leadership style will produce amazing results. But if a person gets stuck in one style of leadership, they can quickly become a catalyst of their own chaos.

For example, imagine the chaos an army general on a family vacation would make if they can't switch out of command-and-control mode. He would be running around shouting urgent orders at everyone, when all they wanted to do was relax at the beach.

It would be just as crazy as wasting time on taking a vote on whether or not you should run for your lives while a building is burning down around you. Once again it would be as chaotic as having a leader refusing to facilitate, initiate or be responsible during an important project while hundreds of people are depending on them to lead the conversation.

THE LEADERSHIP SPECTRUM

Command & Control/Dictator	Collaboration & Democracy	No Leadership Required
In urgent and emergency situations that demand decisive actions and decisions.	In planning and complex decision-making processes, especially when the decisions impact more than just yourself.	When everyone is relaxing and taking time out. When there's no urgency and the situation is not going to impact anyone.

In our relationships we must learn to identify what style of leadership is a good match for the situation, conversation or decision-making process that we are in. If we fail to match the right leadership style with the right situation, we can easily become a catalyst of our own chaos.

Part of the fragile balance in relationships is that in order to maintain harmony, both the husband and the wife must accurately identify which leadership style is appropriate for the moment.

This is a good talking point if you are trying to understand each other's reactions to a particular situation. Ask them what leadership style they thought was the best fit for that circumstance? Understanding each other's perception of the circumstance, will help to understand why they chose that particular leadership style for that moment.

THE COST OF INFLUENCE

Despite the temptation to snatch power through manipulation and control, true lovers always pay full price for the treasure of trust, respect, influence and mutual wilful submission. There are never any discounts. It's always expensive and true lovers can always afford it.

They pay the price for it every day through a currency of walking in their identity and deep connection with the love of God, through safe emotions and behaviours, through safe atmospheres, through courageous vulnerable conversations, through good information and through generous negotiations.

I'll close this chapter with this, leadership is a skill that anyone can learn, and the returns that come back from developing your leadership abilities are exponential. If you want to connect with exceptional leadership training – then look up John C Maxwell. He is in my opinion the world expert on Leadership.

Chapter 10

Sacred Pathway Number 7

The Sexual Pathway

OUR HONEYMOON

We both married as virgins. I'm the only guy that Alanna has ever kissed. The most physical I'd ever been was kissing a few girls. Neither of us had a porn issue. When it came to masturbation as an 18 year old I felt like I was addicted.

Then one day God challenged me to stop. I had nothing against the idea, I just didn't think it was possible. My immediate reaction was actually, "God, that's out of my hands." But that wasn't entirely true...

God responded by releasing a grace on my life that set me free that very day. Just like that, it wasn't an issue for me anymore. That didn't mean I had no sex drive, I did, but by the grace of God I had more self-control than sex drive.

The Bible doesn't say anything about masturbation. It might be helpful if it did, because masturbation and porn are increasingly becoming a confusing space for a lot of Christians – girls and guys. (If you want to go deeper on exploring topics like this, healthy boundaries and many other relationship topics, we will be covering them in our 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy training. www.raisingroyalty.com/7-sacred-pathways.)

We will also cover that further in just a moment...

When it came to our honeymoon - were complete sex rookies.

We had kept our boundaries all the way. I hadn't been touching or looking at Alanna's bum, vagina or breasts and she hadn't been touching or looking at my bum or penis. Everything was about to be a surprise.

I'm not usually very good at keeping surprises from Alanna. Even the day that we got engaged, she said to her friends – I'll show you my ring when I get back. I don't even know how she knew I had the ring, because I thought I was so sneaky! She wasn't even that surprised when a helicopter landed, picked us up and dropped us at the top of a mountain where I proposed.

But I did manage to surprise her with our honeymoon. Remember, we didn't have much money – but we had a lot of faith. I booked 2 weeks at a 5 star Hotel on the Gold Coast in Australia. I had no money for it, but God said do it. Then after I'd done it, someone said they would like to pay for our honeymoon accommodation. Yay Jesus!

Right after we got married and left the reception, while we were driving to the hotel for our first night together – the atmosphere in the car was tangible with an amazing sense of holiness that had us both in awe. It is one of the most precious memories we share.

Preparing for marriage and for actually having a sex life felt so naughty and fun and exciting. Wow, we read some Christian books on preparing for sex with diagrams and explicit directions that did nothing for helping us to calm down before the wedding.

One book even gave explicit instructions on how ladies could do sex stretches to prepare for the big event.

Our honeymoon was fantastic! We stayed in luxury, went on great adventures, had a blast and had sex for the very first time! Lots of sex – we were very happy!

SHAME & COMPARISON

SHAME

Whenever you are talking about anything to do with sex, there can be some challenges. Two big challenges that I want to highlight are shame and comparison.

Our sexuality and sexual journey is one of the most private parts of our story. Often our greatest shame in life is connected to some aspect of our sexual journey. Whether it is abuse, something that happened, something that didn't happen, a mistake, a regrettable past, an addiction, something someone said to us about our sexual performance, how big something is, how small something is, how well something works, how badly something works, a sexual failure, the list goes on.

When it comes to sexuality, and our sexual journey, shame seems to have a disproportionate ability to attach itself to our lives. There's a difference between guilt and shame. Guilt is the belief that we did something wrong. Shame is far more toxic. Shame comes from the belief that there is something intrinsically wrong with who we are.

Our sexual experiences whatever they are, have a disproportionate ability to speak to us about our identity, our value and our worth. Because our sexual journey is so private it is also the very last thing to come into the light during our repentance and transformation journey. Because we feel so much shame, people often go decades without telling a single soul about the time they were raped or abused or other traumatic sexual events that they have been through.

Because we tend to keep our sexual shame and journeys to ourselves so much, the lies that we have believed about ourselves through those experiences, can continue to define us our whole lives.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 JOHN 1:9 ESV

The cleansing that we need is to have the lies that are the source of our shame removed and replaced with the truth. The cleansing comes from the renewing of our minds. Any belief that produces shame is anchored in a lie. If there is any shame attached to our sexual journey or sexuality it is anchored in a lie. The good news is that all we have to do to start removing that shame is to start discovering the beautiful truth about who we really are.

Every belief that produces shame is a lie – the truth is, God made you perfectly in His image and He alone defines you.

² “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

ROMANS 12:2 NIV

Something I recommend if you are going through this process of saying goodbye to shame is to bring the shame, bring the experience, bring the pain, bring the words, the injustice, the sin, the regret, the accusations, the lies and the brokenness to God and say to Him, “God, here’s what I’ve believed about myself – what do you believe about me?”

I would encourage you to make it a regular process and you will be amazed at all the wonderful things that God believes about you. If you can find a safe listening ear, that too goes a long way. If facing these issues is traumatic, I would encourage you to seek out an experienced Christian minister or professional to help you through the process. Or join us here in The Online School of Sonship, where you can begin your own journey into freedom: www.raisingroyalty.com/7-sacred-pathways

COMPARISON

Comparison is the thief of joy.

Theodore Roosevelt

Your story is the only one you have, it is priceless and God makes all things work for good. Don't get caught in the place of comparison. Especially when it comes to sex. If you are dreaming of improving your sex life and you hear of other couples that are having more sex than you or better sex than you – comparison won't get you any closer to your goal.

Comparison is the thief of joy but gratitude is a multiplier. As you journey towards your dream, focus on everything that you have to be grateful for and you will see that gratitude is like a good friend who halves your sorrows and multiplies your joy.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

ROMANS 8:28 NIV

NO SEX FOR AGES...

During the most chaotic season in our marriage we would go months on end without sex.

Professor Denise A. Donnelly spoke with *The New York Times* about her research into sexless marriages. After her study she estimated that 15% of married couples have not had sex with their spouse in the last six months to a year.

One man I talked to was in a sexless marriage for 30 years before it ended. He remarried and was delighted to share with us that now in his late 60's his sex life is the best it's ever been.

During these sex droughts I blamed Alanna 100% for our tragic love life. It's true that Alanna was the one with the made-up excuses for why tonight was not a good night for sex when I was trying to initiate, which really frustrated me. At the same time, I happened to be a narcissist who was creating all my own chaos and taking absolutely no ownership for my mess and expecting her to be really turned on by that.

It was during those days that we finally got desperate enough to talk to a counsellor. One of their suggestions was that we start scheduling sex nights and sensual nights.

Advice that they gave us is that sex nights did not always have to end in intercourse. Hand jobs and other sexual activities can be a good compromise. It was a helpful counselling session from one of the most experienced Christian marriage counsellors in the world.

Each couple has their own story when it comes to sex. I know couples who had fantastic sex lives who are now divorced. I know couples who due to health complications find sex a very difficult part of their relationship. I know couples that have an amazing sex life. Our sex life went from a wild honeymoon then to a sex famine and now it's the best it's ever been.

There's a lot that can go right when it comes to sex inside a marriage, but there's also a lot that can be extremely challenging.

7 COMMON SEX ISSUES IN MARRIAGE

AFFAIRS

One of the greatest marriage issues of all time is affairs. Affairs don't just happen out of the blue. When your marriage is founded on deep, rich, authentic intimacy and romance that has you absolutely captivated and wildly in love, an affair is extremely unlikely. The vast majority of the time affairs happen because there is pre-existing pressure or disconnection in one or more of "The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy."

This is no excuse for having an affair, it's just the facts. When the standard of the culture in our marriage, is lower than the divine design for marriage that marriage is in danger. Imagine The "7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy" are like a fortress wall around the castle of your marriage. If the walls are crumbling, that castle is in a weak position to defend against an enemy attack.

But when the fortress wall is strong and secure, the castle of your marriage stands safe and protected, secure against enemy attacks.

"Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom."

SONG OF SONGS 2:15 NIV

This verse in Song of Songs speaks of proactive intuitive maintenance. It's predictable that if The "7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy" in your marriage are struggling your marriage will struggle even more when the storms of life hit with force.

This puts the focus on us to consistently take proactive intuitive action to strengthen our marriages and bring the culture of our marriages into alignment with the divine design of intimacy and romance that God has always intended.

Few things shatter trust so violently as adultery. Having sex with someone who is not your spouse might ruin more than your sex life – it could be the end of your marriage. Although, many couples have reconciled after adultery and rebuilt their marriage into something beautiful.

Many marriages live with the chaos of repeat affairs. But few things cause such an abrupt end to a marriage as an affair.

Bob and Audrey Meisner, who have an amazing relationship ministry walked through a powerful reconciliation after Audrey had an affair and gave birth to a bi-racial son. They had been married for 17 years. They were pastors and leaders in their city. They met at Bible College and they hosted a Christian TV Program.

However, at the core of their relationship they were not powerful people. Audrey was a passive-aggressive wife who had avoided confrontation with her husband for 17 years. Eventually the pressure and dysfunction of their power struggle caused a break in their connection. When the opportunity for an affair presented itself – Pastor Audrey embraced it and began a 3-week sexual affair before breaking it off and confessing it to her husband.

They had a lot of mess to tidy up. Fortunately for the world, good people came around them and coached them through the journey to becoming powerful people who now have an exceptional ministry that transforms marriages all over the world.

PORN

The scope of the issues surrounding porn in our generation are staggering and these issues are invading millions of marriages. Here are some American porn statistics gathered by the Barna Group and also by Covenant Eyes.

The first 2 statistics I want to look at show how big the porn issue is and how little support is available.

- 57% of pastors said that porn addictions were the single most damaging issue in their church. 69% of pastors stated that porn has had a negative impact on the church.
- A tiny 7% of pastors said that their church provides any type of support to people who are struggling with porn.
- That leaves 50% of churches where porn is the biggest issue in their church, yet they are doing nothing about it.

Here's a shocking reason why there's so little support for people with porn addictions in the church:

68% of men who attend church regularly and more than 50% of pastors admitted to observing pornography on a consistent basis. 76% of Christian young adults between the ages of 18-24 years said they search for and watch porn on a consistent basis.

According to this study over 50% of American pastors are themselves struggling with porn. They can't help people if they aren't free themselves.

55% of married men and 25% of married women admitted to watching porn on at least a monthly basis.

47% of American families acknowledge that porn is a consistent problem in their household.

56% of American divorces record one spouse as having and “obsessive interest” in porn sites.

<https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon/>
<https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>

For those struggling with porn, there is a lot of hope. But it starts with taking extreme ownership for your issue. Then it requires desire. Once you are willing to take massive action to break your addiction, you will discover a huge amount of existing support networks, especially online, dedicated to helping you get free.

A LOW SEX DRIVE AND NOT BEING IN THE MOOD FOR SEX

Ok, so, once I bought a Christian book called, “How To Turn Your Wife Into A Nymphomaniac”, by Calle Zorro. Not to be mistaken for another title that I accidentally clicked on while looking for a link to this book called “How to Turn Your Wife into a Raving Nymphomaniac” by Mike Riley, which just blasted an uninvited picture of a naked woman across my screen.

It all sounds very explicit, but Calle Zorro’s book is actually focused on getting guys to take extreme ownership for how they are treating their wives.

I picked up a few tips, but I was still missing the bigger picture that my lack of ownership for my attitude and my failure to take care of “The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy” was creating an atmosphere that was mass producing “I’m not in the mood” excuses.

Here's 10 things that can reduce someone's sex drive:

- **UNSAFE ATMOSPHERES**

The first turn off for Alanna was me being a consistently desperate, sulky love leech who punished her with unsafe emotions and atmospheres when I didn't get sex.

Now, this was a vicious cycle right – I'm desperate because she's never in the mood. Then I trigger and she is less "in the mood" than ever. Then we have a dead-end conversation. Then I punish her with a negative atmosphere. Then she ignores me and I go to sleep offended and sulking like a baby.

One of the most powerful, extreme ownership moments that changed our marriage happened when I stopped taking offense, sulking and punishing Alanna for not being in the mood. It completely changed the culture in our marriage. It also took the pressure off Alanna having to constantly deal with my bad attitude.

It's also a lot sexier than sulking – which, to my delight I began to discover.

- **NARCISSISM**

The thing with narcissism is it's basically blindness. So it doesn't matter how much chaos you are creating – the problem is never you. That is so convenient if you are a narcissist, because it means you don't have to deal with your own attitude and you get to blame everyone else.

Let me throw out an extreme ownership lifeline/reality check – if there has been sustained pain in your relationship for a long time, it's highly probable that on some level you are blind to the true impact of your own attitudes on your marriage.

If you think that your spouse is the issue, like I did. If you've been in pain for years like I was. If you are pretty sure you've already tidied up your mess like I was. There's a good chance that you have a blind spot, like I did.

Not even God could speak to me about this. The only language that I could understand that was confronting me about my narcissism was desperate levels of pain.

It's only due to hindsight that I can now see how my attitude of blaming Alanna for all our problems and punishing her with unsafe atmospheres were some of the major causes of her low sex drive.

The first thing I had to take ownership for was creating a safe atmosphere in our bedroom. Banish all sulking and punishment from your bedroom and see how that works out for you. Fast from sulking, moaning, whining and punishing in your bedroom and watch what happens.

The solution for narcissism is extreme ownership. We went on an ownership rampage.

As mentioned previously, we had to identify all our fake agreements and broken promises. We both took extreme ownership for that. We stopped lying to each other. I took ownership of Alanna's need for sensual touch and made sure that I didn't initiate sex on a night that was dedicated to satisfying what she wanted, when she wanted it and how she liked it.

Although it's possible that she isn't always in the mood for sleep after her full body oil massage. I will say, it takes a fair amount of self-control to give your wife a full body oil massage and then just go straight to sleep. I'm getting better at doing hard things.

Serving Alanna like that is a pleasure and it has helped to create a spectacular change in our marriage.

- **STRESS**

One of the biggest causes of people not being “in the mood”, and it’s not just wives – is stress. I’ve got female friends who have been/are ravenous for sex and just wishing their husbands would jump them – but they’re “not in the mood”.

I got busy taking care of all “The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy”, because whenever there is pressure on any of “The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy” it produces stress, which leads to people “not being in the mood”. It’s not just about sex, it’s about creating the most wonderful intimacy and romance in our marriage possible.

The world is always going to throw storms at you and you can’t remove all stress from life. What I was addressing was all the areas in our marriage where my actions or lack of actions were adding stress.

- **EMOTIONAL CONNECTION**

This is an area that requires continual investment. A strong emotional connection can completely flip the script on someone being “in the mood.”

- **PARENTING PRESSURE**

For us there were definitely seasons where having kids shut down our sex life. It was different after each kid. Sometimes it can be a physical issue or exhaustion or Alanna was “touched out”, after having little kids climbing on her all day and breast feeding day and night. Sometimes we compromised. Sometimes it was best just to get some sleep. Sometimes it was all on! We had to give each other a lot of grace in challenging seasons like that.

- **HORMONES**

Low testosterone in men and hormone imbalances in women can cause a low sex drive. For women a balanced diet, exercise, good sleep, reduced sugar and avoiding inflammatory foods can help with hormone production and increased sex drive. For men with low testosterone, it's worth consulting with a health specialist.

- **BORED WITH YOUR SEX LIFE**

Sometimes after being married for a while, spouses can get bored of the same of sex. Here's a few tips that sexperts will often recommend to fire up a boring sex life!

- 1: Make a weekly sex date. Spontaneous sex doesn't always happen – so schedule some.
- 2: Stop having intercourse for a while and explore other ways of pleasuring each other sexually.
- 3: Give your spouse very good information, it doesn't matter if you've told them before – talk to them about all the things that turn you on sexually and get you boiling like a kettle!
- 4: If you are the partner who does less of the initiating – take the lead and initiate sex as soon as possible. (I won't be offended if you stop reading for a while).
- 5: Take a trip down memory lane and talk to them about all your favourite sexual experiences together.

- SEX IS EVIL

Many people in church grow up being taught that sex is evil - Alanna included. This teaching goes back to the 4th century where early church fathers Jerome and Augustine began a false teaching that married people were second class citizens because they had sex lives, but celibate priests belonged to a higher class. This can create a deep psychological impact on people. Medical practitioners, counsellors and sex therapists sight this as one of the major causes for women either struggling to orgasm or never achieving orgasm at all without coaching and therapy.

ALANNA

One of the clearest memories I have around sex was Dad saying at the dinner table one night "if you come home pregnant, don't come home". There was a general avoidance of the topic of sex and an impression that it was dirty, not for you and to be avoided at all costs. This definitely shaped my perspective in a (mostly) subconscious way that sex is bad. I did get to see my dad later recant this statement but it still had an impact on me.

Because sex was a taboo subject, I don't really feel that I was properly prepared for it when the time came, except for the preparation Benji and I did prior to getting married.

- I JUST DON'T ENJOY SEX

If one spouse doesn't enjoy sex and the other spouse loves it, then things can reach a stalemate without generous negotiation. If one partner decides they don't want to have sex anymore, like my friend's ex-wife did, which led to a sexless marriage for over 30 years, they have sentenced the marriage to extremely dangerous territory.

If you cannot come to a beautiful agreement that leads to each of you getting what you want, when you want it and how you like it, then it is recommended that you seek professional mediation and advice to help you with your negotiations.

- **I NEED SOME ADVENTURE!**

I'm sure you didn't forget that I just told you that I bought a book once called "How to Turn Your Wife Into a Nymphomaniac". Let me give you the hottest tip I got from that book by Calle Zorro for increasing a wife's sex drive... There were a lot of others, but this was one of the ones that stood out to me at the time:

- **EXHILARATION!**

Ensure to create regular events in her life that leave her feeling absolutely exhilarated! Regardless of whether or not your partner has a low sex drive, it's such a great feeling to be intentional about creating or supporting them to go on adventures and do things that they absolutely love.

Don't just do this for sex or it will not necessarily be appreciated. Let this be an expression of your genuine care for your wife and a way that you look after her needs. When you do it right, it creates a deep sense of emotional connection and gets great chemicals, hormones and endorphins flowing through your wife's body – which is always a good thing for physical, mental and emotional health.

Conveniently when people are feeling great on a consistent basis, they are much more likely to be "in the mood". As the old saying goes... "happy wife, happy life".

WEAPONISED SEX

In a co-dependant marriage or a marriage with a power struggle or an abusive marriage, sex can become weaponised and used selfishly or to punish the other partner. From withholding sex, or using sex as a tool for manipulation, through to adultery or rape, sex is often weaponised.

If sex has become weaponised in any relationship, professional support should be sought immediately.

PAINFUL SEX AND HEALTH ISSUES

In this category the recommendation is going to be the same for all issues, connect with a sex therapist or a health specialist to explore your best options for advice, check-ups and to explore treatment options.

- **HEALTH ISSUES THAT REDUCE OR ELIMINATE SEX**

There are a range of extreme health issues that can dramatically reduce or eliminate sex from a marriage for a short or long term season. We would highly recommend that if you are going through a serious health issue that reduces or eliminates sex from your marriage for a season, that you receive some professional advice on the best way to navigate such a challenging season.

Avoid the mindset that says – “We’ve got this, we can work it out alone”. Seek trusted professional support, to help you process and dialogue and plan through this season.

Work together to discover what sexual activities are still options. As always – be generous negotiators.

- **PAINFUL SEX**

Sex is not supposed to be painful, but the Sexual Advice Bureau in the UK reports that a third of younger women and a half of older women have experienced pain during sex. Apart from using ample lubrication it is suggested that you seek professional help for this as it can be connected to a range of medical issues.

<https://sexualadviceassociation.co.uk/womens-sexual-problems/>

- **PROBLEMS WITH ORGASM**

Both men and women can experience problems with reaching an orgasm. It is much less common for men. However for women the inability to reach orgasm is surprisingly high. Since studies began in 1948, these statistics have been confirmed over and over again. During sex men reach orgasm on average 95% of the time.

According to Psychology Today and ABC News, only 25% of women ever reach orgasm through vaginal sex alone. 10 – 15% of women never reach orgasm at all. All those in between only reach orgasm if stimulated by fingers, tongues or other sex equipment.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/all-about-sex/200903/the-most-important-sexual-statistic>

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/ReproductiveHealth/sex-study-female-orgasm-eludes-majority-women/story?id=8485289>

- **ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION**

While erectile dysfunction increases with age, the Journal of Sexual Medicine published that 26% of men under the age of 40 have issues with erectile dysfunction. Erectile dysfunction is increasingly common with people who regularly view porn. They have delved so heavily into sexual fantasy realms and pornography that when it comes to a real woman they cannot get an erection. Which, if you weren't sure, it means that the penis stays floppy rather than going hard and erect, and sex is not possible with a floppy penis.

[https://www.jsm.jsexmed.org/article/S1743-6095\(15\)30428-8/fulltext](https://www.jsm.jsexmed.org/article/S1743-6095(15)30428-8/fulltext)

- **PREMATURE EJACULATION**

The International Journal of Impotence reports that up to 30% of men worldwide suffer from premature ejaculation. As a teenager I had a fear of premature ejaculation on my wedding night. It was actually one of the reasons that I used to justify masturbation.

I had no idea that there were sexercises that you can practice with your partner to significantly increase your sexual stamina. I first heard about it in the book "Intended For Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfilment in Christian Marriage", which was written by a Christian Doctor Ed Wheat and his wife Gaye Wheat.

If you need some good sexercises to increase your sexual stamina and you are both willing to commit to it – go grab yourself a copy. If you are about to get married or you are already married and want some basic sex tips, it's a great option. If you aren't even engaged yet, I'd probably just wait, especially if you have a strong sex drive, because it's going to set your sex drive on fire.

No need to fuel sexual frustration right?

<https://www.nature.com/articles/3901507>

OFFENSE AND FALSE JUDGEMENTS

EPHESIANS 4:26 ESV

“Be angry, yet do not sin.” Do not let the sun set upon your anger.”

If there is emotional disconnection, offense or a power struggle unfolding in your marriage, all sex could be off the menu for a long time.

Offense leads to suspicion and suspicion always assumes the worst and ends in false judgements. That’s exactly where I was stuck for years. I wouldn’t have said I was offended. I would have just said that I think Alanna had a bad attitude towards sex.

While it is true that she didn’t have a great attitude towards sex, I used her bad attitude to justify putting all the blame for our marriage problems on her alone and assumed I was perfect.

But I did it secretly. I never came out and said that to anyone, it was all deep in my heart I believed she was the issue. In my prayers – she was the one that needed help!

It can take a long time to come back from a place of offense, suspicion and false judgements, because in your mind, you turn the spouse that you fell in love with and married – into a villain!

The fastest way to freedom from here is to intentionally embrace an attitude of gratitude for your spouse. Start thinking about and speaking out loud to your spouse all the things that you genuinely appreciate about them. Make it a point to fast thinking negatively about your beloved and to intentionally celebrate them as often as possible.

I intentionally make it a habit to vocally appreciate Alanna and celebrate her. I love to do it in front of the kids or in front of guests. I do it privately as well, but I love to honour her out loud. Gratitude is both a great antidote and a great preventative when dealing with offense.

DIFFERENT SEXPECTATIONS

⁶“How beautiful you are and how pleasing, my love, with your delights! ⁷ Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. ⁸ I said, “I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit.” May your breasts be like clusters of grapes on the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, ⁹ and your mouth like the best wine. May the wine go straight to my beloved, flowing gently over lips and teeth.

¹⁰ I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me. ¹¹ Come, my beloved, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. ¹² Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom— there I will give you my love.”

SONG OF SONGS 7:6-12 NIV

A lady randomly messaged me recently to ask me my perspective on oral sex. She said that when she became a Christian she stopped giving her husband oral sex because she heard somewhere it wasn't a very Christian thing to do. It had been causing a major argument in their marriage ever since then - for over 20 years... obviously he really wanted it.

What are your sexpectations in marriage? Are they healthy? Are they causing issues in your marriage? What's ok? What's not? How much is too much? What do you really wish your spouse would do for you?

¹⁸“May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. ¹⁹ A loving doe, a graceful deer— may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.”

PROVERBS 5:18-19 NIV

Everyone comes into marriage with their own personal set of sex expectations. One of the courageous conversations, that all couples need to have if they want to create a marriage where each person is giving and receiving the most extravagant love possible, is the “Sex expectations” conversation, in order to find out what their spouses want, when they want it and how they like it.

This conversation needs to be a safe, open and vulnerable ongoing conversation and a practical exploration that supplies each spouse with detailed intimate information of all the sexual needs, wants, dreams and desires that they each have. It’s very hard for anyone to satisfy a secret desire, so find some courage and have a vulnerable sex expectations conversation.

As this conversation begins to unfold, many couples discover that their sex expectations are completely different and they are faced with a major challenge as they try to navigate the waters of different sex expectations.

The most common one is – how often should we be having sex? No one can answer that for you except yourselves. There is no right or wrong answer to that question and it may change in different seasons of your marriage. Like all things in your marriage your sex life will be at its best when it is founded on detailed intimate information, extravagant giving and receiving and generous negotiations.

For a couple to give and receive generously in their sex lives, they must have the very best information to eliminate unwanted behaviours and to guide their spouse to what delights them the most.

In our chaos days, we were not generous negotiators. We were in a sex drought. No one was receiving what they wanted, when they wanted it and how they liked it. We were stuck in a hostile negotiation that was making no progress. When we finally became so desperate that we saw a counsellor they told us to get over ourselves and schedule sex and sensual nights immediately.

They said negotiate how many times a week will work for you, negotiate what sexual activities you will be engaging in and lock it into the calendar. They said it didn't always have to end in sexual intercourse. They recommended hand jobs or other sexual activities as a good compromise if sexual intercourse wasn't going to happen. Hand jobs and other sexual activities apart from intercourse can be a simple compromise and effective sexual release even if someone's not "in the mood". They talked me through focusing on sensual nights.

We planned it and committed to it and...

It was absolutely tragic.

Alanna hated those nights and the sense of obligation. She dreaded it all day long. Both of us broke our promises and turned our commitment into a fake agreement. While we were in this place, sex and sexual activities were more like a famine than an all you can eat smorgasbord.

Getting anything was a win. The concept of getting whatever we wanted it, when we wanted it and how we liked it was never part of our conversation. We were not generous lovers and neither of us got what we wanted.

We did that for a year or so, until I started to have my awakening to the reality that I was the catalyst of my own chaos.

Around that time we renegotiated. I asked for an extra sex night a week. I realised that what we had negotiated really wasn't enough for me and it lead to sexual frustration that turned me into a desperate love leech, which wasn't fun for anyone. Alanna generously agreed and I was absolutely delighted about our agreement. It also made it much easier for me to honour her sensual needs when my love tanks were full.

This time – we kept our promises. We started seeing momentum on our marriage and little by little we saw transformation in all of “The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy”, which radically reduced the pressure in every area of our lives. As the pressure lifted, we experienced a whole new world in our sex life!

We eventually stopped the scheduled sex and sensual nights as things took on a more organic and spontaneous rhythm that we both enjoyed.

As you get vulnerable and start initiating courageous conversations around sex expectations, you’ll want to find out from each other what your sex expectations are: How often do you each want to have sex or engage in sexual activities? How do you want to have sex and what do you want to be on the sex menu? Where do you want to have sex? What do you like the most? What don’t you like? What is an absolute no for you? What’s an absolute must?

You’ll need to find out from each other what you think about oral sex, masturbation, hand jobs and different positions? The Bible doesn’t offer much specific guidance on what sexual activities you should include in your marriage as a result most couples base their decisions on personal preference.

We couldn’t give you a list of do’s and don’ts straight from the Bible, but Paul does encourage us to keep all things pure.

“Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

HEBREWS 13:4 NIV

Are there any sexual activities that you don’t want to be a part of your marriage? Are there any that you really do want to be a part of your marriage?

As for the lady who messaged me asking about oral sex – I told her there is nothing in the Bible that says anything against it. We aren't opposed to it either. Now, there's no Bible verses on this but there has been a lot of conversation about it in Christian circles in recent years, you'll have to come to your own conclusions on this, but we are not into anal sex.

Funny story though. We were training up a team of young people to go on missions trips to Thailand and Tanzania and one of the guest speakers, who was speaking to a group of teenagers and young adults, got very serious and was giving us a list of things that were sins.

Then he paused for effect, looked out at all the single teenagers and young adults with us and said dramatically, "If you take your wife up the bum – you go to hell!" Much to our shock!

We didn't really need that pep talk to come to the decision that it wasn't on the menu in our marriage.

For us, one of our agreements is that whatever sexual activities happen in our marriage, they happen together. Porn has never been an issue for us, but it's strictly unacceptable. Whatever sexual wants, needs, dreams or desires we have must be met together, nothing is done alone or in secret.

That means, no one is sneaking off to masturbate or watch porn. I'll make a couple of comments here about masturbation. There's obviously unhealthy masturbation. Anything connected to porn in anyway is a major issue and if you are justifying porn of any sort you are lying to yourself.

Porn is an easy shortcut to sexual release that will become a cancer that destroys whoever it touches. You can't control porn, just like you can't control a wildfire in your pants. It will burn whatever it touches. If you are like millions of other Christians struggling with porn, take it seriously.

Fight it like cancer. Don't hide it and don't justify it, because sooner or later porn will stop being your friend and it will find a way to destroy you. You can't trust porn – it wants to destroy your life and it's just waiting for the right moment to do so. Whether it's erectile dysfunction, addiction or leading you to break someone's heart and destroy your own marriage – porn takes all its victims to places they never wanted to go.

Masturbation can be connected to unhealthy sexual fantasies and be unhealthy and destructive. But it isn't always connected to sexual fantasies and it isn't necessarily unhealthy or destructive. Everyone has different opinions on this and as I mentioned, the Bible doesn't say anything about masturbation. God confronted me personally about masturbation because it was an issue for me and I was out of control.

One of the reasons I engaged in masturbation as a teenager was that I believed the lie that if I didn't masturbate, I would be no good at sex when I got married. It's simply not true. How long a guy lasts before ejaculation during sex can be influenced by how often they have sex but it's not the only factor. As mentioned previously, the book "Intended For Pleasure", walks couples through an in depth guide on how to build sexual stamina for men.

A simple solution if you are planning a sex night as a couple and you want it to last longer, is to perform some form of sexual activity in the morning that causes an ejaculation for the husband and that will usually ensure that he lasts longer during sex anywhere in the next 12-24 hours.

Couples will have to experiment with that. Ed Wheat M.D. the author of "Intended For Pleasure" suggests that for a guy sex is at its most pleasurable when there is a space of about 24 hours between sex. As a couple you can experiment and find out what works best for you. Every person's physiology is unique so you will just have to perform sexperiments.

Having run ministry training schools and camps with a lot of young people for over 15 years we have found that during sex talks masturbation is always a big topic. Especially for single people. Girls and guys.

HERE'S MY TOP 3 MASTURBATION TIPS.

1: Resist the urge as much as possible.

Masturbation is a self-help service. It's like unlimited refills on your coffee. Just because it's there, doesn't mean it's good for you. Masturbation is addictive and if you become addicted, then like any addiction it can ruin your life. Exercising self-control over your desire to masturbate will develop healthy levels of self-control and will power. Regular masturbation rewires the pathways in your brain and releases a dopamine hit every time you do it, which is why it is addictive. Resisting the urge as often as possible will prevent you from losing control and becoming addicted to masturbation.

My first recommendation is resist it as much as possible.

2: Never Involve Porn and Never Imagine Anything Sexual Outside of Yourself and Your Spouse

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

MATTHEW 5:27-28 NKJV

The Greek word for heart in this verse is the word “kardia”, but it does not just refer to the physical heart. It refers to the mind, soul and imagination also.

When you start to involve porn and imagining sexual encounters in masturbation, you cross into another level of the spiritual realm. Not only is this more addictive, it can lead to serious spiritual oppression. Not many people are aware of the sex demons Incubi and Succubi, but they are no joke. We have had to walk with a number of people as they got freedom from Incubi and Succubi, which are some of the most horrific expressions of demonic oppression that we've ever encountered.

An Incubi is a masculine sex demon. A Succubi is a feminine sex demon. This may seem very extreme or shocking and that's exactly what we thought when people first started coming forward to us to share what they were experiencing.

We found that people were experiencing deep prolonged torturous trauma under the influence of Incubi and Succubi. As we walked with them and researched it further we discovered that accounts of Incubi and Succubi go back for thousands of years.

We are not even close to experts in this field, we just had friends and students who were really suffering and we journeyed with them towards freedom. The majority of people that we worked with who were suffering affliction from Incubi and Succubi, were young ladies who had been through sexual trauma, but we have journeyed with both male and female victims, and it was either sexual trauma or engaging in porn and imagining sexual acts that opened the door of influence for this demonic oppression.

I can understand if this seems unbelievable. We would have thought the same thing if we did not have people consistently coming to us for years with the same story looking for help. Incubi and Succubi can torment a person in their mind with sexual perversions, but the hardest thing for us to process was when people described that these sex demons would turn up in their rooms at night and rape and abuse them consistently for years.

For some it was just mental torment, but others were consistently in physical pain for years after these demonic experiences. There's a lot more to say on this topic, but this is not the place. (Join us for many open ended question and answer sessions and conversations in The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy training where we can go deeper on topics that we can only touch on here: www.raisingroyalty.com/7-sacred-pathways).

I mention this mainly for the sake of the people out there who are suffering in silence through these most horrific experiences. There is freedom. Jesus really can set us completely free from porn and all sexual oppression. To deal with this I would recommend that you talk to a trusted Christian who is very experienced in Inner Healing, but who is also familiar with the supernatural, because you will need some expert help with this and someone to journey with you personally.

It's also a warning. You may get more than you expect if you experiment with the realm of porn and imagining sexual activities because it is a gateway into the spiritual world. Are you sure you want to unlock it?

3: What's Worse Than Masturbation?

The third masturbation tip that I would give is, if you can't resist and you do masturbate... don't feel bad about it.

Don't take any sense of your identity from it and don't allow any guilt or shame to attach itself to you at all if you do masturbate. In my opinion, feeling guilt or shame about masturbating is a much more toxic and destructive habit than masturbation in itself.

OK, I think that's all I have to say about masturbating outside of marriage. Inside of marriage and with your spouse masturbating yourself and each other is something that you will want to discuss inside your sex expectations conversation to discover what each of your needs, wants, dreams and desires are.

AMAZING BENEFITS OF A GREAT SEX LIFE IN MARRIAGE

Yes, there are many challenges that face our sex lives, but there's also phenomenal benefits attached to great sex. Here's a few of them...

- **FILLING THE LOVE TANKS TO OVERFLOWING**

For a lot of people whose love language is physical touch there is no better way to receive love from their partner, into the very core of their being, than through great sex. It's not only the act of sex that fills their love tanks. It's the sense of appreciation that their spouse knows them so intimately and knows exactly how to blow their mind with great sex that can have them feeling euphoric for days after great sex.

The feeling of being loved lasts well beyond just the moment of sex.

It's not just in that moment when a gifts person receives a gift that they feel loved. It's not just in the moment that a words of affirmation person receives a kind word that they feel loved – it's the memory of how their spouse has so generously poured out their love on them in such an extravagant way that causes them to be repeatedly flooded with love because of the generous act.

A single moment of amazing sex can cause a person with a physical love language to be filled with love to the core of their being over and over again as they think about the precious gift that they have just received.

- **GENEROSITY SPARKS A CHAIN REACTION**

In a healthy relationship generous loving inspires more generous loving. Instead of a hostile selfish stand-off like we used to live in – we are now caught in an extravagant cycle of generous loving that is full of amazing surprises, delights, pleasure and excitement that leads to both of us having our needs, wants, dreams and desires consistently and generously taken care of.

- **EMOTIONAL CONNECTION**

As well as being surrounded by the awareness that your spouse truly cares about what you want and how you feel, which creates strong emotional connection, sex also releases oxytocin. Oxytocin is a bonding chemical. It's the same chemical that helps bond a mother and her baby during breastfeeding.

This blissful feeling of emotional connection grows and grows as a couple continues to love each other generously and extravagantly. On top of this, sex boosts self-esteem.

- **THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF GREAT SEX ARE AMAZING!**

Sex produces a range of powerful chemical reactions. Great sex releases dopamine, the feel-good chemical; oxytocin, the bonding chemical; serotonin, a natural anti-depressant and feel good chemical. Sex also releases endorphins, which detox cortisol and are natural pain killers.

Sex releases DHEA which is another anti-depressant and it also boosts your immunity.

Sex improves your sleep quality. It counts as exercise, it strengthens pelvic floor muscles and increases cardio-vascular health.

<https://thethirty.whowhatwear.com/what-happens-during-sex>

- **GREAT SEX IS FUN AND LIGHTS UP YOUR LOVE LIFE!**

Great sex took us years to figure out. It doesn't have to take that long at all, but for us it did. The sense of joy, fun and excitement surrounding a great sex life is phenomenal, especially when we compare it to the tragic love life of our past.

Improving our sex life has changed the whole atmosphere and culture of our marriage. Now instead of a dreaded obligation, sex is one beautiful part of the harmony of our exciting marriage adventure that involves creating a beautiful balance in all of "The 7 Sacred Pathways To Intimacy."

CONCLUSION

Alanna and I are still on a journey. Every day we still have to choose our hard things. Do we want to maintain what we have created or do we want to go back to our chaos days?

We are willing to do whatever it takes, not just to make sure that we never go back, but to journey more deeply together into the intimacy and the divine romance that God always intended for us. From this place of priceless intimacy, we are excited to dream together for our wildest dreams.

We are so grateful to God that He got us through our dark days, and that we now get to delight in one another and serve each other extravagantly in love as we enjoy the adventure of raising our family, bringing dreams to life and unleashing Heaven on Earth together.

We want to thank David Riddell for his counselling sessions, we want to thank all the authors and speakers who have been courageous enough to be vulnerable and share with us the keys that we have needed to redesign our marriage.

We want to thank all our friends and family for the love and strength that you have given to us over many years. We want to thank John and Fiona Steffens our Senior Pastors for being such wonderful friends and leaders for so many years.

And we want to thank you for reading this book, we count it an honour and our hope is that it has been a rich blessing to you.

In closing, our greatest piece of advice to you is – do hard things.

Do as many hard things as possible as often as possible. Do hard things so that you develop the self-control to do whatever it takes to get whatever you want and then use that self-control to dream with God and to unleash Heaven as you bring your wildest dreams to life!

¹⁷“Then, by constantly using your faith, the life of Christ will be released deep inside you, and the resting place of his love will become the very source and root of your life.

^{18–19} Then you will be empowered to discover what every holy one experiences—the great magnitude of the astonishing love of Christ in all its dimensions. How deeply intimate and far-reaching is his love! How enduring and inclusive it is! Endless love beyond measurement that transcends our understanding—this extravagant love pours into you until you are filled to overflowing with the fullness of God!

²⁰ Never doubt God’s mighty power to work in you and accomplish all this. He will achieve infinitely more than your greatest request, your most unbelievable dream, and exceed your wildest imagination! He will outdo them all, for his miraculous power constantly energizes you.

²¹ Now we offer up to God all the glorious praise that rises from every church in every generation through Jesus Christ—and all that will yet be manifest through time and eternity. Amen”

EPHESIANS 3:17-21 TPT