



Joy in the Journey

How God Uses Marriage and Relationships to Help Us Grow

Based on Life Model Works

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when you face [relational] trials, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Allow perseverance to finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

“Most marriage problems are not marriage problems. They are maturity problems that marriage has made visible.”

THE GAP

An undeveloped adult maturity skill

THE DISGUISE

Shows up as a personality clash, recurring conflict, or quiet disconnection

THE TRUTH

The marriage isn't broken — the person/people still has growing to do

EVERY UNRESOLVED GAP BECOMES ONE OF FOUR PATTERNS

The Four Marriage Patterns

DEMAND

Pushing, clinging, reassurance-seeking. Trying to get needs met through pressure, anger, or emotional escalation.

↳ *"I always..." / "You never..."*

WITHDRAW

Shutting down, going silent, emotional absence, hiding behind busyness, tasks, or ministry.

↳ *Cold peace. Present in body, absent in heart.*

CONTROL

Managing the environment, the spouse or outcomes. Micro-managing to create safety. Chronic criticism.

↳ *"If I can control this, I won't get hurt."*

LOSE SELF

Disappearing into the spouse's preferences. No voice, no boundaries, endless appeasement—until explosion.

↳ *Agreeable on the outside. Resentful underneath.*

Adult Stage Maturity Indicators

Primary Task in this Stage: Taking Care of Two People Simultaneously

Primary Problem if Incomplete: Unable to form Mutually Satisfying Relationships

Personal Tasks	Community & Family Tasks	When the Tasks Fail	Resources to Help
1. Cares for <u>both</u> self and others simultaneously; can see others through “eyes of heaven”	Provides the chance to participate in group life.	Is self-centered; leaves other people feeling dissatisfied and frustrated	<i>How to Raise and Adult Hold me Tight Created for Connection</i>
2. Remains stable in difficult situations and knows how to return self and others to joy.	Affirms that the young adult will make it through difficult times.	Finds it hard to process difficult emotions in a healthy way; participates in negative/destructive reactions.	<i>RARE Leadership ThriveToday.Org (blog)</i>
3. Bonds with peers; develops identity.	Provides positive environment and activities where peers can bond.	Is a loner, with tendencies to isolate; shows excessive self-importance.	<i>Connecting (Crabb)</i>
4. Takes responsibility for how personal actions affect others, including protecting <u>others</u> from self.	Teaches young adults that their behaviors impact both others and history.	Is controlling, harmful, blaming, manipulative, and unprotective toward others.	<i>Just between Father & Son Living with Men</i>
5. Belongs and contributes to the community.	Allows young adults to do important community tasks.	Does not become a life-giving contributor to the community. Is self-absorbed and uses others – DRAINS SOCIETY	<i>Tattoos on the Heart Passion</i>
6. Expresses the characteristics of his/her heart in a deepening <i>personal</i> style.	Encourages each person to develop <u>true</u> self.	Is driven to ‘play roles,’ prove self to the world, get results, and seek approval.	<i>Living from Heart Jesus Gave You The Gifts of Imperfection</i>

No	Sometimes	Usually	Yes	
				I have moved from “me-ness” to “we-ness” & can take care of at least 2 people at the same time in a way that feels mutually satisfying. I am a team player and can easily partner with others. My relationships are marked by fairness and mutual satisfaction.
				I can synchronize with others—attuning to their feelings and needs while also expressing mine.
				I have bonded with peers. Together, we effectively use our collective power, seek truth, and enjoy close relationships.
				I can remain stable & relational in difficult situations and return myself & others to joy.
				I protect my personal and group identity when boundaries are violated.
				I take responsibility for my actions & protect others from my power when necessary. I use my personal power well to bless myself and others and can integrate my sexual and spiritual parts.
				My personality is integrated (not compartmentalized) and I remain the same person when in different roles and when under duress. I can embrace my pain, passion, and talents into one life giving identity.
				I live in a way that expresses my heart while also affirming the unique identities of others.
				I make important contributions to my family and community.

**NINE
ADULT
SKILLS
THAT SHAPE
MARRIAGE and
BUILD HEALTHY
RELATIONSHIPS**

*Each skill, when
absent,
finds its way into
your
relationships —
disguised as
something else.*

1

Me → We-ness

2

**Emotional
Synchrony**

3

**Bonded Peer
Community**

4

**Stable &
Relational**

5

**Identity
Protection**

6

**Responsible
Power**

7

**Integrated
Identity**

8

Heart Expression

9

**Contribution &
Legacy**

From Me-ness to We-ness

"I have moved from 'me-ness' to 'we-ness' and can take care of at least two people at the same time in a way that feels mutually satisfying."

WHEN THIS SKILL IS ABSENT

- Decisions default to 'what works for me'
- Keeping score — who sacrificed more, who 'wins'
- Partnership feels draining, not energizing
- Mutual satisfaction feels like a threat
- Difficulty celebrating spouse's success

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN MARRIAGE

- Recurring arguments about fairness that never resolve
- One spouse chronically overlooked; the other unappreciated
- Financial and parenting decisions become battlegrounds
- Sexual intimacy given when the other person 'earns' it
- Two separate lives in one house

Reflect: Where do you see this in yourself — not your spouse?

Emotional Synchrony

"I can synchronize with others — attuning to their feelings and needs while also expressing mine."

WHEN THIS SKILL IS ABSENT

- Can't notice when spouse has shifted emotionally
- Responds to words; misses tone and underlying pain
- Floods spouse with own feelings — no space for theirs
- Emotional numbness when spouse expresses strong feelings
- Feels threatened by spouse's sadness or fear

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN MARRIAGE

- 'You never listen' — partner insists they heard every word
- Conversations about feelings become power struggles
- Classic pursue/withdraw cycle — one escalates, one shuts down
- Sexual intimacy becomes mechanical and disconnected
- Spouse feels unseen; partner feels unfairly accused

Reflect: Where do you see this in yourself — not your spouse?

Bonded Peer Community

"I have bonded with peers. Together, we effectively use our collective power, seek truth, and enjoy close relationships."

WHEN THIS SKILL IS ABSENT

- Spouse is the only real friend and confidant
- No same-sex friendships of real depth
- Isolation that feels comfortable but breeds brittleness
- No one outside the marriage who can speak truth
- Difficulty sustaining friendships requiring vulnerability

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN MARRIAGE

- Spouse bears the full weight of all emotional needs — and collapses
- Jealousy when spouse has close same-sex friendships
- No outside perspective: marriage becomes an echo chamber
- Emotional affairs with coworkers who 'understand' them
- Crisis hits — no support community; two drowning people

Reflect: Where do you see this in yourself — not your spouse?



**"It's Not
Too Late"**



Stable & Relational Under Pressure

"I can remain stable and relational in difficult situations and return myself and others to joy."

WHEN THIS SKILL IS ABSENT

- **Floods** — loses ability to think when emotions rise
- **Stonewalls** — goes silent or shuts down entirely
- **Escalates** — voice rises, body tenses, fight-or-flee
- Needs hours or days to recover after any conflict
- Cannot stay present with a spouse in visible distress

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN MARRIAGE

- Every disagreement feels like a threat to the relationship
- Repair attempts fail because both people are flooded
- Long cold seasons that neither knows how to end
- Children exposed to chronic emotional instability
- The calmer spouse becomes sole emotional manager — exhausted

Reflect: Where do you see this in yourself — not your spouse?

Identity Protection

"I protect my personal and group identity when boundaries are violated."

WHEN THIS SKILL IS ABSENT

- Doesn't know where self ends and others begin
- Chronic people-pleasing — agrees outwardly, seethes inwardly
- Either no boundaries at all or rigid walls instead
- Tolerates disrespect or contempt and calls it 'grace'
- Loss of self in the relationship — own needs unknown

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN MARRIAGE

- Extended family or outside voices control the marriage
- One spouse repeatedly dismissed and does not push back
- Resentment from years of unspoken 'no's that were never voiced
- Marriage has no shared identity — just two people in proximity
- Contempt enters — the leading predictor of divorce

Reflect: Where do you see this in yourself — not your spouse?

Responsible Use of Power

"I take responsibility for my actions and protect others from my power. I use personal power to bless myself and others and integrate my sexual and spiritual parts."

WHEN THIS SKILL IS ABSENT

- Unaware of the weight moods and words carry for spouse
- Uses size, volume, silence, or withholding as control
- Refuses accountability: 'You made me' / 'You're too sensitive'
- Sex and spirituality feel compartmentalized and opposed
- Uses spiritual language to avoid emotional vulnerability

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN MARRIAGE

- Spouse walks on eggshells around partner's moods
- Sexual intimacy avoided or used as reward or punishment
- Spiritual leadership becomes control or abandonment
- Financial power wielded unilaterally rather than shared
- Apologies come with conditions or excuses attached

Reflect: Where do you see this in yourself — not your spouse?

Integrated Identity

"My personality is integrated — not compartmentalized — and I remain the same person in different roles and under duress. I can embrace my pain, passion, and talents into one life-giving identity."

WHEN THIS SKILL IS ABSENT

- One self at work, another at home — spouse gets the lesser version
- Stress or conflict reveals a personality the spouse doesn't recognize
- Wounds and trauma hidden rather than integrated
- Passions kept separate from home life — marriage starved of vitality
- Fear that being fully known would mean being fully rejected

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN MARRIAGE

- 'I don't know who you are' — met one person, live with another
- Jekyll-and-Hyde patterns leave spouse anxious and hypervigilant
- Intimacy blocked by the fear of being completely known
- Spouse never brought into interior world — dreams stay hidden
- Marriage feels shallow despite years together

Reflect: Where do you see this in yourself — not your spouse?

Living From Your Heart

"I live in a way that expresses my heart while also affirming the unique identities of others."

WHEN THIS SKILL IS ABSENT

- Life looks nothing like actual desires or values
- Subtly reshapes spouse to be more comfortable or familiar
- Withdraws or punishes when spouse expresses difference
- Performs a version of self rather than inhabiting one
- Chronic inner emptiness despite outward success

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN MARRIAGE

- Spouse feels loved for their role — not as a person
- One spouse slowly disappears into the other's vision
- Creative, spiritual, passionate parts of self extinguished
- Marriage becomes a performance for others — not a life lived
- Midlife crisis: suppressed hearts finally demand to be heard

Reflect: Where do you see this in yourself — not your spouse?

Contribution & Legacy

"I make important contributions to my family and community."

WHEN THIS SKILL IS ABSENT

- Life organized around consumption rather than contribution
- No clear sense of what the family stands for
- Difficulty identifying purpose beyond personal comfort
- Withdrawal from community — marriage becomes an island
- Children raised without seeing parents give generously

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN MARRIAGE

- Marriage lacks a shared mission — coexist but don't co-create
- One spouse carries all hospitality and community work alone
- Children inherit a family identity of passivity
- Marriage becomes self-referential and slowly shrinks
- Boredom and drift: two people without shared purpose

Reflect: Where do you see this in yourself — not your spouse?

THREE THINGS TO CARRY FORWARD

Growing Up Together

01

Name Your Own Gap

Identify one or two skills

that you sense are missing in yourself (not your spouse).

Share it as a confession of growth, not a critique.

Revisit this assessment every 6 months together.

02

Let Marriage Be a Maturing Ground

Ask your spouse: "Where do you see me struggling with this?" Then listen without defending. Your spouse is your closest witness.

03

Find Community That Grows You

Maturity is never developed alone. You need **same-sex peers**, a **safe mentor couple**.

Practice Immanuel Prayer and Immanuel Journaling
- share with your spouse/
friend

INTERACTIVE LESSON



BOOK

Marcus Warner *and* Chris Coursey



The 4 Habits of *Joy-Filled* Marriages

How 15 Minutes a Day Will Help You Stay in Love

• *Brain Science Hacks that Boost Your* •

Emotional, Spiritual, and Physical Connection

A PRAYER FOR ALL OF US

“Father, we didn’t receive everything we needed growing up. (Neither did our spouse.) We have brought our wounds, our defenses, and our immaturity into this marriage (relationships)—and somehow You called it holy ground.

Grow us up. Not just for our own sake, but for each other’s sake, and for the sake of everyone whose life touches ours.

Make our marriage (relationships)—with all its imperfections—a sign of Your patient, never-giving-up love.

Help me to see what you see in myself, and to see what you see in others.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Questions to take home and pray through

FOR YOU

- *Which gap was hardest to recognize in yourself? What made it land?*
- *What pattern do you default to — Demand, Withdraw, Control, or Lose Self?*
- *Where in your story — family of origin, formative years — was this gap created?*

FOR YOUR SPOUSE

- *Which of your spouse's gaps has cost you the most in the marriage?*
- *Can you name what you now understand about their behavior that you didn't before?*
- *What would it look like to respond to their gap with compassion instead of frustration?*

TOGETHER

- *Which gap is most present in your marriage right now? Say "we" — it belongs to you both.*
- *What would growth in this area look like for you as a couple over the next season?*
- *Who in your community — mentor, elder couple, counselor — could walk with you in this?*