

Patterns of Feeling and Behavior

Chapter 4: The Commitment to Growth — Worksheet

Instructions: Complete this worksheet privately, taking time for honest reflection. Then share your insights with your partner. The goal is not to assign blame but to recognize patterns that may be affecting your relationship — and to discover the freedom that comes from self-awareness.

For each section, write as much as you need. Use additional paper if necessary.

Part One: Tracing My Patterns

Our earliest experiences with caregivers create patterns that often replay in adult relationships. This exercise helps you trace connections between past and present.

A. The most significant frustrations or hurts I experienced in childhood were:

(Consider relationships with parents, siblings, or other caregivers. What situations caused you pain, fear, or frustration?)

B. When these things happened, I typically felt:

(Name the emotions: afraid, angry, lonely, ashamed, confused, helpless, unloved, invisible, etc.)

C. My typical response or coping strategy was to:

(How did you deal with these situations? Withdraw? Act out? Try harder to please? Become invisible? Fight back? Shut down emotionally?)

D. In my relationship with my partner, I sometimes find myself feeling:

(Are any of these feelings similar to what you felt in childhood? When do they arise?)

E. When I feel these feelings with my partner, my tendency is to:

(Is this similar to how you responded as a child? How is it different?)

F. Connections I notice between my childhood patterns (B & C) and my current relationship patterns (D & E):

Part Two: Questions for Dialogue

After completing Part One individually, use these questions to guide conversation with your partner. Listen without defending. Share without blaming. The goal is understanding, not winning.

1. In what ways is my partner similar to one or both of my parents?

(Consider both positive qualities and challenging ones. This is normal — not a sign that something is wrong.)

2. In what ways might I be similar to my partner's parents?

(Ask your partner for their perspective on this.)

3. How am I learning to recognize my own limitations and share them honestly with my partner?

4. How do I feel when my partner listens to my fears and struggles without trying to fix me?

5. What am I learning about the truth that "no spouse can change his or her partner"?

6. What is one example of how I am learning to let go of trying to change my partner and focus instead on changing myself?

7. How does focusing on my own growth (rather than my partner's flaws) affect our relationship?

Part Three: Three Liberating Truths

As you process what you've discovered, keep these truths in mind:

- 1. This pattern is normal.** The tendency to recreate familiar dynamics is not a sign that something is wrong with you. Your subconscious seeks to return to unfinished business from childhood. Understanding this can relieve shame and open the door to healing.
- 2. You survived your childhood.** Whatever difficulties you faced, you developed coping strategies that got you through. You are not helpless. The skills that helped you survive can be refined to help you thrive in marriage.
- 3. You are no longer a child.** You now have freedom your younger self did not have. You can communicate clearly, set boundaries, seek help, and choose — day by day — to respond differently than your instincts suggest.

Part Four: A Commitment to Growth

Based on what I have learned through this exercise, I commit to working on the following aspect of my own growth:

One specific way I will practice this commitment in the coming month:

I ask God's grace to help me with:

Signature:

Date:

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