

“Finding One Another”

by Carlo Griseta

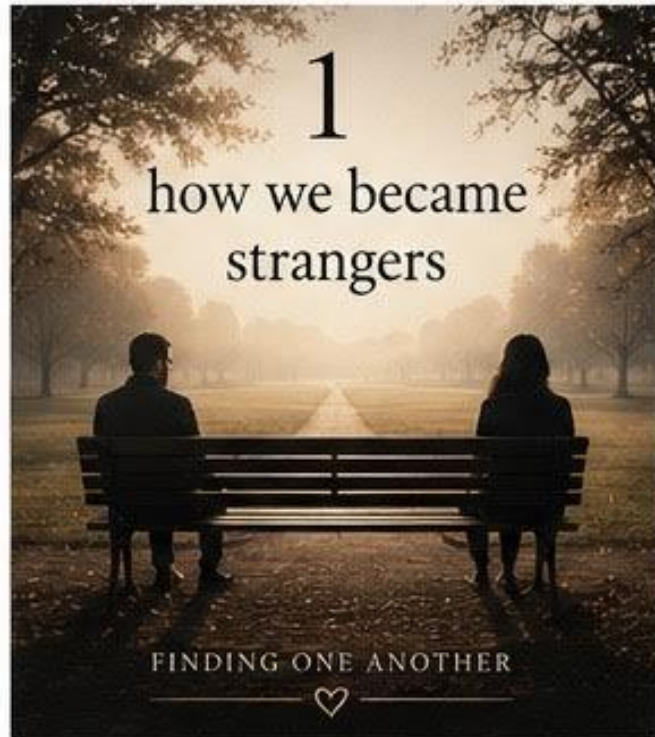
Introduction to:

What Happened to Us?

No couple begins their journey together hoping for distance, silence, resentment, exhaustion, or loneliness.

Most relationships begin with hope, with dreams, with longing, with the desire to love and be loved. Yet somewhere along the path of life, many couples find themselves asking quiet questions they never imagined they would ask:

What happened to us? Where did we go? How did two people who once felt so close become strangers standing in the same room?



The truth is this: wounds are part of being human. Every person enters a relationship carrying experiences, disappointments, fears, unmet needs, expectations, grief, insecurities, and invisible scars. Some wounds come from childhood, others come from betrayal, abandonment, shame, loss, trauma, exhaustion, or simply years of misunderstanding and emotional neglect.

Wounds themselves are not the problem.

Brokenness often occurs when wounds are ignored — deliberately or unintentionally.

When pain remains unspoken.

When silence replaces honesty.

When resentment hardens the heart.

When pride prevents humility.

When fear keeps us from being seen.

When we stop tending to the relationship we once cherished.

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A marriage or relationship does not usually collapse in a single moment, more often, it erodes quietly over time through unattended fractures and unresolved pain.

But there is hope, healing remains possible wherever honesty, humility, responsibility, forgiveness, and presence are willing to enter the room again.

This workbook is not designed to shame you, it is not designed to determine who is the villain and who is the victim, it is not about winning arguments.

It is about rebuilding.

It is about learning how to see one another again.

How to listen again.

How to speak honestly again.

How to heal individually and together.

How to become safe enough for love to breathe again.

The LifeCare FIRST process invites couples to courageously examine five foundational areas of healing and restoration:

- **Forgiveness**
 - *What pain still needs to be acknowledged and released?*
- **Identity**
 - *Who are we beyond our wounds, failures, and fears?*
- **Responsibility**
 - *What ownership must we personally accept for healing to begin?*
- **Supports**
 - *What healthy people, practices, and structures strengthen our lives?*
- **Transition**
 - *What intentional steps will move us toward restoration, growth, and hope?*

This journey requires honesty, it requires courage, it requires participation.

As we often say throughout this process:

“I can give you a shovel, but if you are unwilling to dig, you will never build a foundation or erect walls strong enough to sustain your home.”

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Healing cannot happen through information alone; transformation requires participation. Yet even in brokenness, there is good news: The Presence awaits us. For those who feel exhausted... discouraged... disconnected... or crushed beneath the weight of disappointment...

You are not abandoned; the sacred invitation of healing remains available.

As the ancient words remind us: *“The Presence is close to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit.”*

May this workbook become more than pages to read, may it become a mirror, a conversation, a pathway, a rebuilding process... and perhaps, for some, the beginning of finding one another again.

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Chapter 1

How We Became Strangers

The television was on again.

Neither of them were watching it.

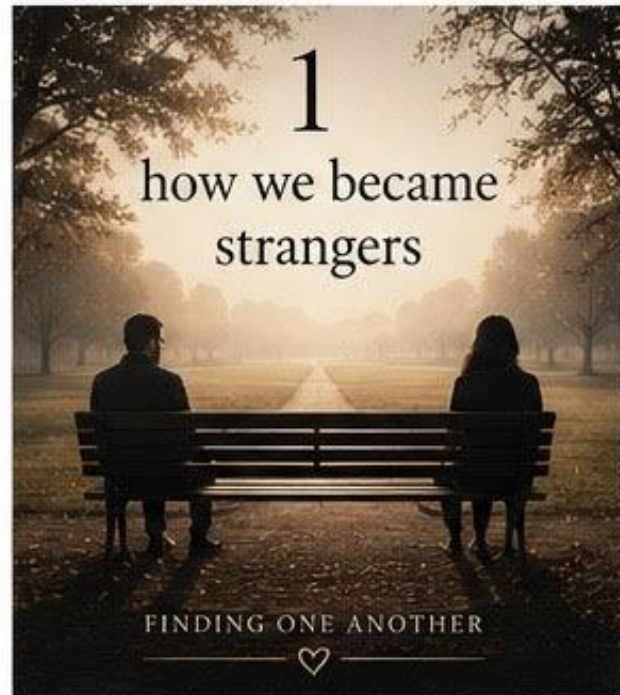
David sat in his recliner scrolling endlessly through headlines and emails while Melissa folded laundry at the kitchen table in silence. The sound of the dryer hummed softly in the background like white noise covering the awkwardness that had slowly settled into their home.

Twenty-nine years earlier, silence between them had felt peaceful, now it felt heavy. Their youngest daughter had moved out eight months ago. For the first time in decades, there were no practices to attend, no late-night school events, no college applications spread across the kitchen counter, no endless interruptions pulling them in different directions. The house was finally quiet. Too quiet.

For years they had survived by staying busy: children, careers, church responsibilities, aging parents, mortgages, sick relatives, financial stress, committee meetings, and the thousand moving pieces that make people feel productive while quietly exhausting them. They had become experts at managing life, but not at tending each other.

Melissa carried the basket toward the hallway, then paused. Without looking directly at him, she asked softly: “Are you happy?” David looked up, almost startled by the question. He opened his mouth to answer quickly, automatically, the way people do when they are uncomfortable with honesty, but nothing came out. Because the truth was: he didn’t know. Melissa nodded as if his silence itself had answered the question. She sat down slowly across from him. For a moment neither spoke. Then she whispered something he would think about for months afterward: “I think we disappeared somewhere along the way.”

David immediately felt defensive. Part of him wanted to explain:



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- how hard he had worked,
- how much pressure he carried,
- how tired he had been,
- how much responsibility rested on his shoulders.

None of those things were untrue, but beneath the defensiveness was another feeling he could not escape: grief.

Somewhere deep inside, he knew exactly what she meant. He remembered the early years when they would sit awake talking for hours about dreams, fears, attraction, hope, faith, and the kind of life they wanted to build together. Back then they had been curious about each other. Now most of their conversations revolved around: appointments, groceries, finances, family updates, or whether the trash had been taken out.

Somewhere between surviving life and maintaining responsibilities, they had stopped sharing themselves. Not all at once. Slowly. Quietly. Almost invisibly.

Melissa finally spoke again. “I don’t even know if you still see me anymore.”

David stared at the floor. Because the painful truth was: he wasn’t sure he had been fully seeing anyone lately—not her, not himself, not even his own exhaustion. He had spent so many years trying to provide stability that he never noticed how emotionally absent he had become, and Melissa had spent so many years trying not to need too much that she slowly stopped asking for connection altogether.

Neither of them were evil, neither of them intended harm. They were simply two human beings who slowly drifted into survival mode while assuming there would always be time later to reconnect. But now, later had arrived, and they were sitting across from a stranger they once loved deeply.

Reflection Reading

The Slow Drift

Most relationships do not collapse in one dramatic moment, they erode quietly. Through postponed conversations. Unspoken disappointments. Emotional exhaustion. Busyness. Caregiving. Financial pressure. Parenting. Stress. Phones. Television. Schedules. Responsibilities, and the thousand little distractions that slowly consume our attention.

“Finding One Another”

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Often couples believe they are still connected simply because they still function together, but functioning is not the same as intimacy. Two people can: raise children, pay bills, attend church, sleep in the same bed, share responsibilities, and still feel profoundly alone.

Beneath the visible marriage exists another marriage: *the emotional marriage*, the emotional marriage is built through: curiosity, affection, vulnerability, listening, tenderness, admiration, attention, emotional safety, and shared presence and when those things slowly disappear, couples often begin living beside one another rather than truly with one another. This drift is rarely intentional. Most people do not wake up one morning deciding: “Today I will become emotionally distant.” Instead, survival quietly takes over, and survival changes people. Some become busy. Some become numb. Some become critical. Some withdraw. Some hide in work. Some disappear into parenting. Some become emotionally guarded because disappointment has accumulated for years. Often both people are lonely at the same time while assuming the other person no longer cares, and because neither knows how to safely say: “I miss you,” the silence deepens.

Many long-term relationships are not destroyed by hatred; they are weakened by unattended distance.

The good news is this: Distance noticed honestly is already the beginning of awakening, because healing often begins the moment two people become willing to stop pretending and start telling the truth gently.

Individual Reflection Questions

For Personal Reflection

Take time separately before discussing together.

Write honestly. Not defensively. Not performatively. Honestly.

Questions

1. When did you first begin sensing distance in the relationship?
2. What parts of yourself feel unseen or unknown lately?
3. In what ways have stress, work, parenting, ministry, caregiving, or exhaustion affected your ability to stay emotionally present?

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4. What conversations have you avoided for fear of conflict, rejection, or hopelessness?
5. Have you become more functional than emotionally connected?
6. What do you miss most about the earlier years of your relationship?
7. When do you feel most alone?
8. What do you wish your partner understood about you right now?
9. Have you stopped asking for certain needs because you no longer believe they will be heard?
10. What fears arise when you think about the future of your relationship?

Shared Conversation

Guidelines Before Beginning

Before discussing these questions together:

- Do not interrupt; do not correct.
- Do not defend yourself immediately.
- Do not weaponize vulnerability later.
- Listen to understand, not to win.

Your goal is not perfection, your goal is presence.

Conversation Prompts

1. What parts of life slowly pulled us away from one another?
2. When did we stop feeling emotionally close?
3. What do you think we both sacrificed during the years of survival?
4. What pain have we each been carrying quietly?
5. What do you still appreciate about each other?
6. What would help you feel emotionally safer with me?
7. Do you believe we still want connection, even if we no longer know how to reach for it?

Weekly Practice

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Returning Attention

This week, practice small intentional presence. Not problem-solving. Not fixing. Not debating. Simply noticing each other again.

Assignment

For the next seven days:

- Spend 20 uninterrupted minutes together each day without phones, television, or distractions.
- During that time, ask one meaningful question rather than discussing logistics.
- End each conversation by expressing one thing you appreciate about the other person.
- At least once this week, revisit a positive memory from earlier in your relationship together.

Optional:

Take one walk together in silence without needing to fill every moment with conversation. Sometimes safety begins simply by learning to remain near each other again.

Closing Reflection

Relationships rarely disappear all at once, most often they fade quietly beneath years of responsibility, exhaustion, disappointment, and unattended longing.

The moment two people become honest enough to notice the distance without cruelty or blame, something sacred begins to happen: Presence returns, and sometimes, Presence is where love finds its way home again.