

“Finding One Another”

by Carlo Griseta

Chapter 2

Living Beside Each Other

Angela could not remember the last time they laughed together naturally. Not polite laughter. Not the quick smile exchanged in front of other people. Not the kind used to avoid awkwardness. Real laughter, the kind that once made time disappear. She stood at the kitchen sink rinsing dishes while Michael sat at the counter answering emails from work even though it was nearly nine o'clock at night, again. The television murmured softly in the living room. Two phones buzzed intermittently.

The dog slept peacefully beneath the table. Everything looked normal, that was the strange part. Nothing appeared broken, and yet something inside the relationship felt painfully absent. Michael finally closed his laptop and stretched his shoulders. “Long day,” he muttered. Angela nodded politely. Polite, when had they become polite? There had been a time when they would have talked for hours after the children went to bed: dreaming, touching, arguing passionately, laughing, sharing stories, wondering about the future. Now most evenings passed in quiet efficiency, they functioned well together. Very well.

Bills were paid; the house was maintained. Holiday gatherings were organized. Grandchildren were adored. Responsibilities were fulfilled.

From the outside, they looked successful, but internally they had become something closer to roommates than companions. Not because they hated one another, because they stopped arriving emotionally.

Years earlier, when the children were young, survival required constant movement. Michael buried himself in work because he believed providing financially was one of the greatest expressions of love. Angela buried herself in caregiving because



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everyone seemed to need something from her constantly. Neither noticed the subtle drift occurring between them.

Whenever discomfort surfaced, life interrupted before they had to fully face it. There was always another obligation. Another school event. Another bill. Another crisis. Another church responsibility. Another exhausted evening, and eventually, they stopped reaching for one another altogether, not intentionally. Gradually. Over time, disappointment became quiet assumption.

Angela stopped asking for emotional connection because she no longer wanted to feel rejected. Michael stopped initiating meaningful conversations because he constantly felt like he was failing somehow and no longer knew how to bridge the gap, so they coexisted. Peacefully. Respectfully. Lonely.

That night, Angela dried her hands and sat across from him, she studied his face for a long moment. Older now. Tired. Good-hearted. Familiar. Suddenly she realized something painful: They still knew each other’s schedules, but they no longer knew each other’s inner world.

She spoke softly. “Do you ever feel like we only talk about life... but never about us?” Michael looked down immediately. Not because he was angry, but because the question frightened him. He had sensed the same thing for years but kept hoping it would somehow repair itself naturally once life slowed down. But life had slowed down, and the distance remained. He rubbed his hands together nervously. “I don’t know how we got here,” he whispered. Angela nodded slowly. Neither did she, but for the first time in a long time, they were finally talking about it.

Reflection Reading

When Function Replaces Connection

Many couples become highly skilled at managing life together while quietly losing emotional intimacy, this often happens gradually and invisibly. Especially in long-term relationships where survival, responsibility, parenting, careers, ministry obligations, caregiving, and exhaustion consume enormous emotional energy.

Over time, couples can unintentionally begin relating to one another primarily through: logistics, schedules, obligations, responsibilities, tasks, and

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problem-solving. The relationship becomes functional, but no longer deeply relational.

This is one of the great hidden dangers in long-term partnership: two people can remain committed to the structure of the relationship while becoming emotionally absent within it.

In many marriages: conflict decreases, conversations shorten, vulnerability disappears, curiosity fades, affection becomes infrequent, and emotional risk feels unsafe or unnecessary. Not because love completely vanished, but because emotional connection stopped being intentionally nourished.

Healthy relationships require more than shared responsibilities, they require: attention, emotional presence, playfulness, admiration, tenderness, listening, vulnerability, and ongoing curiosity about one another's inner life. Without those things, couples often begin living parallel lives. Near each other physically, far from each other emotionally. Many people quietly adapt to this distance for years. Some even convince themselves: “This is just what marriage becomes.” But deep emotional loneliness inside a relationship slowly affects the human spirit. People begin feeling: unseen, undesirable, emotionally unsafe, unnoticed, disconnected, or quietly resigned, and because the relationship still appears stable externally, the loneliness often remains hidden. Sometimes both people are grieving the same distance while lacking the language or courage to name it.

This chapter is not about blame, it is about awareness, because emotional intimacy rarely survives accidentally, it must be protected intentionally.

Individual Reflection Questions

Personal Reflection

1. Have we become more focused on managing life than nurturing connection?
2. When was the last time I felt emotionally close to my partner?
3. What parts of our relationship feel alive right now?
4. What parts feel emotionally distant or numb?
5. Have I stopped initiating connection in certain ways? Why?
6. What emotional needs have gone unspoken?
7. Do I still feel emotionally safe bringing vulnerability into the relationship?
8. Have I mistaken peaceful coexistence for true intimacy?

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9. In what ways have I emotionally withdrawn over the years?
10. What kind of relationship do I truly long for now?

Shared Conversation

Conversation Guidelines

Speak slowly. Listen carefully. Avoid fixing. Avoid defensiveness.

The purpose is understanding—not winning.

Conversation Prompts

1. When do you think we began functioning more like partners in responsibility than companions in life?
2. What distractions or pressures slowly pulled our attention away from one another?
3. What do you miss emotionally about earlier seasons of our relationship?
4. What helps you feel emotionally close to me?
5. What causes you to withdraw emotionally?
6. Have there been moments you felt alone even while sitting beside me?
7. What small changes would help us begin reconnecting emotionally?

Weekly Practice

Relearning Curiosity

Emotional connection grows where curiosity returns.

This week is not about solving the entire relationship, it is about becoming interested in one another again.

Assignment

Over the next seven days:

- Ask your partner one question each day that is not logistical.

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- Examples:
 - “What has been weighing on you lately?”
 - “What do you miss about earlier years of our relationship?”
 - “What makes you feel most loved?”
 - “What have you been carrying silently?”
- Spend one evening together without television or phones for at least 30 minutes.
- Share one memory from your relationship that still makes you smile.
- Intentionally notice one thing about your partner each day that you may have stopped appreciating openly.

Write down what you notice emotionally during the week. Noticing is often the beginning of reconnection.

Closing Reflection

Many relationships do not fail because love completely disappeared, they weaken because attention disappeared. People stop arriving emotionally. Stop asking questions. Stop sharing honestly. Stop noticing one another, and slowly, two good people begin living *beside* each other instead of truly *with* each other. But emotional distance, when noticed compassionately, is not the end, it may be the beginning of waking up again.