

# Intimacy in Marriage — out of Shame or Grace

These two pages have been written to try to clarify a fundamental paradigm distinction of understanding what love, marriage and human commitment looks like from two totally different perspectives. The terms “Other-Validated” and “Self-Validated” are borrowed from the writings of Dr David Schnarch, and reference is made to his book *Passionate Marriage* for further reading.

**Other-Validated Intimacy** sounds like this:

“I will tell you about me, but only if you tell me about you. If you don’t, I won’t either. But I want to, so you have to. I’ll go first and then you’ll be obligated to disclose. That’s the rule! If I go first, you have to make me feel secure. I need to be able to **trust** you. But I’ll have to keep an anxious eye on you, because you hold my value in your hands.”

Put into **wedding vows** this sounds like:

“I know I’m telling you that for the rest of our lives together I’m making the choice to *choose* you, to love you, honour you, care for you, marry my *true self* to you in every conversation, every argument, every decision, every act of living together, every joy and sorrow—to keep up this *marrying*, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, sexually, financially, conversationally.

I know I’m telling you that this will be my commitment to myself *whatever* changes, come sickness or health, poverty or wealth, and all the realities of the uncertainties of life. I know I’m saying that no matter what, I want to be with you so we can grow old together and watch the miracle of human loving and human growth occur between one another...

but...

Underneath all that, here’s the *real promise* I’m making to you, and don’t you ever forget it!...

You see, I’m incredibly insecure about who I am, whether I am desirable, whether I have the adequacy to face life, to become the best I can be and offer that to others. It’s hard to admit, and mostly I avoid facing it, but deep inside, I live with a core terror that I’m not worth knowing. My fear is that if I were truly seen and known, I would be rejected. Some experiences I’ve had have confirmed that. Show who you really are, say what you truly think — and people back away! There is a shame at the core of my soul that provokes me to go on a lonely spiritual journey to discover who God made me to be, and what this disquiet is inside that I can never really silence. But I don’t want to go there, I’m scared that it’s true and that there is no grace for someone like me.

But when I’m around you, I feel really good about myself. You seem to like me, you enjoy being with me, you laugh at my jokes, you seem interested in what matters to me, you want to hold and touch me, you light up sometimes around me in a way that makes me feel just great, and I like it. So here’s my real promise...

I promise to give you the opportunity to keep that up for the rest of my life! (And while ever you do, I’m sure I’ll love you and we’ll get along just fine.)”

## **Self-Validated Intimacy** sounds like this:

"I'm so glad to have you in my life, and I want you to know me before I die. I want to share with you my days that without you would otherwise be more empty and less meaningful. It would be nice if you liked me, and sometimes agreed with me, but there is something far deeper and more important than that. You can't love me if you don't know me, and I want you to know me. I'd prefer not to have to face your rejection, but I have to face that possibility if I'm ever to feel accepted or secure with you. And really, my fears of your rejection are only a defence against my greater fears of facing my own separateness and my own mortality.

I'm *not* asking you to come through for me, and I'm not asking *myself* to trust you for what you can never give me. Come, let me show myself to you — including my fears and weaknesses, including my struggle to find who I am as a child of God, and in so doing let me transcend my aloneness, take responsibility for my own spiritual growth, and learn to love one other person well."

Put into **wedding vows** this sounds like:

The underpinnings...

"I have been quiet, (or pummeled by life) for long enough to feel the reality of shame and fear and rage at the scary facts of my existence. I know that in this wonderful life suffering is never an option for men and women, we all suffer—the only option is **how** we suffer, and whether and how we seek our God to find the ultimate answers that can come from no one else and in no other way than by a relationship with God in Jesus our Lord.

And I know that you were not put here on this earth as the one to whom I look to find rest of soul, my true identity and the reason to live. In fact, I know you have your own spiritual journey to travel, your own shame and fear to confront, and your own darkness to acknowledge and come to terms with. So, let's get this straight—I won't depend on you, and I don't ask you to depend on me for the ultimate dilemmas of our existence. We do that as immutably separate individuals.

but...

Up on the surface of all that, here's the promise I'm making, and don't let me ever forget it!...

I'm made with an incredible capacity for relationship, intimacy and love, and I want, in my all-too-brief life, to learn to love **you** well (Others of course too, but I get to choose you as my life-long companion). So I'm telling you that for the rest of our lives together I'm making the choice to *choose* you, to love you, to honour you, to care for you, to marry my **true self** to you in every conversation, every argument, every decision, every act of living together, every joy and sorrow—to keep up this **marrying**, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, sexually, financially, conversationally. I'm telling you that this will be my commitment to myself and in God's hearing *whatever* changes, come sickness or health, poverty or wealth, and all the realities and uncertainties of life. I'm saying that no matter what, I want to be with you so we can grow old together and watch the miracle of human loving and human growth occur between one another, and onto generations to come. Indeed, to love as we are loved by the God who has created and redeemed us!