

*Hope After Hurt... From Heartache to Healing*

By Roxanne & Rob Maroney

# *Hope After Hurt*

*From Heartache to Healing*

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## ***Book Summary:***

Whether you're single, dating or married this book will transform your relationship. "Hope After Hurt" is a book for men and women alike at all stages of their relationship. If you feel disconnected, struggling, or stuck, even after counseling, read *Hope after Hurt* before you do anything else. Or if things between you and your partner seem too tidy or perfect, but you're wondering what happened to the adventure, the passion, and those feelings of your first dates, *Hope after Hurt* offers a roadmap to a healthier relationship.

Roxanne and Rob Maroney have seen it all after leading intensive four-day marriage workshops every month for nearly ten years, teaching, coaching, and counseling couples looking for hope before giving up on their marriages.

But that's only a small part of their story. In *Hope after Hurt*, Roxanne and Rob reveal how they kept their own marriage from becoming another divorce statistic. They offer a transparent telling of how their early histories unknowingly haunted their marriage and their choices and how they dramatically changed their destructive path.

They open up about secrecy, lies, broken trust, loss of connection, and damaged intimacy. This is not just a story of two flawed people and their need for repair but also an honest account of more than forty years of healing using practical tools for greater connection and intimacy in marriage. *Hope after Hurt* is not just a book for those in crisis, but gives real-life examples and helpful tools for healthier connection.

## ***About The Authors:***

For the past fifteen years, Rob and Roxanne Maroney have been helping couples rebuild relationships threatened by lack of intimacy, lost connection, damaged love styles, and broken trust. As a trained counselor and life coach, Roxanne works with women and couples to help heal and repair broken relationships. Rob spent twenty-five years in the corporate world with major international companies and now works with a nonprofit counseling and teaching ministry. Rob works with men recovering from sexual integrity issues.

They both have educational backgrounds in psychology, biblical counseling, and Christian life coaching. They are certified in Gottman Therapist Training and are SYMBIS (Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts) facilitators.

Rob and Roxanne live in Orange County, California, and have been married for over four decades. They have three grown children and thirteen grandchildren. From their own experience of repair and recovery, Rob and Roxanne share openly and candidly what they learned about building a marriage to last. *Hope after Hurt* is a story that needs to be told to give hope to those

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in need.

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## **Introduction**

*Roxanne*

*Brokenness is the awareness that you long to be someone you're not and cannot be without divine help. — Larry Crabb, Shattered Dreams*

More than we know, or at least like to admit, we live in the shadow of our early histories. Many psychologists theorize that the first ten years of life are the most important and impressionable when it comes to forming healthy and secure relationships later in life. Recent research has even shown that the first two to three months of life create the imprints we carry for a lifetime. These early years are when the brain is forming neural pathways that equip us to trust, bond with others, relate with empathy, resolve conflict, manage our emotions, and so much more.

Although I wasn't aware of it then, as I looked back on those early years of my life, I realized I arrived at some major conclusions about relationships, trust, shame, fear, and life in general, mostly from what I witnessed living in a broken family. In my twenties, I heard marriage would be as easy or difficult as my childhood, so I concluded marriage was not in the cards for me. I was too flawed, too jaded to beat the odds. I also recall hearing that because of my parents, I had a greater-than-average chance of becoming an alcoholic or marrying one, which became another compelling reason to avoid the whole proposition. Both my parents were married four times, so I had serious doubts about the whole institution of marriage.

Rob, on the other hand, was much more optimistic about marriage. His parents were married sixty-two years until his father died. He came from what he considered a normal family, but his definition of normal was to be challenged in the years ahead. Although his parents stayed together, the family was emotionally disconnected, leading Rob to accept that marriage might mean living together as compatible roommates, even if unhappy.

Despite my history and apparent obstacles, I fell in love and said yes to marriage, hoping my experience would be different, but the seeds of fear remained. Although I've altered and added to my beliefs over the years, the ones I really lived by at my core remained unchanged. I knew I was broken, but I didn't understand exactly where or how to change. Not until after much pain and the desire to grow did I realize I needed to root out some of those false beliefs from my heart and mind one errant strand at a time.

As we talk about our brokenness, what do we mean? It doesn't simply mean extreme remorse or sadness, regret or shame, or being at a low place in life. All these emotions were at work in me, and yet I remained stuck. I think of brokenness as the awareness of how my broken environment affected me, as well as acknowledging my humanness, blind spots, and yes, sin, without detouring into shame and self-pity. I came into this world as a precious newborn but determined to have my own way.

Gradually and continually, however, I surrendered to a better way. Some of my first lessons of healing involved learning and accepting where I was flawed so I could then move to

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embrace something higher, something better, something enduring. I came into this broken, tainted, imperfect world like a wild rose, untamed and subject to the environment around me. But the process of healthy brokenness is recognizing my need to submit to the loving hand of a gardener's pruning shears, not to destroy but to be set free to flourish.

This is not just the story of two people who were damaged and in need of repair but two people freed up enough from their pasts to experience healing and restoration. The first two chapters are not meant to be a self-indulgent stroll down memory lane but a way to offer context and hope—hope that change is possible even when the path is littered with potholes and pain. We are the sum total of what we heard, saw, and experienced growing up and the conclusions we came to as a result. But by God's grace, change is possible. I journeyed from victim to victor, although not as quickly as I would have wanted, never arriving at some perfect state but more at peace with the person I'm becoming.

As we share our stories from our individual points of view, some memories will be repeated. We did this because, as with any couple, we experienced these moments together, but we often saw them from different vantage points.

This book is for both men and women. This book is for couples who are in need of a flicker of light in a dark or stuck marriage. Our highly sexualized culture and faulty role models have hijacked our thinking and delivered a tainted message to both men and women about their value, creating distorted views of sex and intimacy. Most of what we learned about sex and intimacy were caught rather than taught.

Men and women both have developed a worldview of sex and intimacy based on faulty thinking and lousy information. This toxic combination often creates great distress in a relationship and calls for much more than a makeover or a mere "paint job." Instead, a healthy understanding of true intimacy needs to be redefined, reformed, and restored.

Is there hope after hurt? The answer is a resounding yes. We hope this account of our journey, the challenges and battles we faced in our marriage, and the choices we made to alter our course will encourage any soul who takes the time to read it. I pray it gives the encouragement that you too can tackle your own internal scars and come out the other side whole and at peace with yourself despite enduring imperfections. After over four decades of marriage, our experiences continue to increase our hope and confidence that love and freedom are possible but not without work and intentional effort. Rob and I entered into a broken world with parents who were broken themselves by their own pasts and histories, and only the grace and love of God could bring greater awareness, increased hope, and the power to change.

## **Discussion questions**

At the end of each chapter, we have included discussion questions. We cover many topics in this book, so as you review each chapter, we encourage you to keep a small notebook of your thoughts and any new awareness. Even if you don't consider yourself a writer, jotting down thoughts, prayers, questions, and discoveries will help you make progress. It has been my experience that when I didn't take time to write down and reflect on what I was learning, I just

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had to learn those lessons all over again. Journaling helps you slow down, even for a brief period, to breathe, reflect, and listen for the truth. We hope you will give it a try.

## **A Marriage Short Story** **Roxanne**

We said, “I do,” one bright California morning in 1975. The only available time at the church was 10:00 a.m., and it was a short no-frills event. The reception that followed lasted at most an hour and was not the kind of elaborate event you see at weddings today. No music, dancing, speeches, or toasts—just a few well-wishes from around fifty good friends and family, along with an assortment of nuts, mints, punch, and cake. With hope-filled hearts, we drove off, waving goodbye in our used 1969 Chevy.

We didn’t realize it at the time, but we were each towing an invisible trailer full of our stuff from the past. They say love is blind, but we were not only blind to the stuff each other was carrying, we didn’t see what we were bringing into this relationship ourselves from our own pasts. We heard all the warnings of the trials and challenges that lie ahead in marriage, but we also believed the Bible says to forget what lies behind and strive to move forward, so ready or not, we drove on.

In time, the road got a little rougher; our invisible trailers began to collide. Sometimes there would be a flat tire and some of our stuff would shake loose, but we didn’t know where it came from, why it was there, or understood what it meant.

As much as I wanted to show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness—the fruit of the Spirit—something Rob would do or say would cause a mini-explosion inside me, and my response would be irritation, hurt, or withdrawal. I thought at the time my reaction was justified because of what he did, so we played the blame game, comparing whose actions were worse, but inside, I knew something was up with me.

Still towing our invisible trailers, we looked surprisingly good on the outside. Within just a few years, there were three children, we upgraded to the old familiar family minivan, got a mortgage, and drove on living a normal middle-class life, all the while leading lives of quiet discontent. I was hoping for more emotional intimacy in the marriage, but Rob struggled to know what true intimacy looked like. We both lived in the shadow of our histories and the cultural messages we came to believe, seasoned by our broken thinking. Those beliefs, scars, and habits were slowly eroding the foundation of our marriage. We wanted our relationship to be different, but it felt like we were fighting an invisible enemy.

*When you don’t know what to do you just put one foot in front of the other, until one day you can’t even do that.*

The shame and guilt of seeing other happy couples became too much for me, and I eventually just wanted to run far, far away. But I had three children to think of, and I knew in my heart of hearts I had things to face in myself.

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In one attempt to get his attention, I wrote this story and gave it to Rob. This was a particularly rough place in our relationship, but I wanted to tell him how I was feeling. This was my way of saying, "I'm sinking, but you seem to not notice."

*September 1995*

*Picture a beautiful tranquil lake perfect for water skiing, with tree lined shores and dozens of coves and inlets just waiting to be discovered. Rob and I are out on the lake, he's driving the ski boat. I'm doing my best at waterskiing, but having trouble getting up and being swamped with water each time I try.*

*As the water continues pounding my face, it becomes harder to see, and the constant pull of the rope is making it harder and harder to hold on. I wish I could either be good enough to get up on my skis and effortlessly glide behind the boat, or give up altogether and peacefully sink in the water. I could then just relax, the boat could speed away, and I could float in the water without the constant reminder of what a poor skier I am. It's not fun floating alone, but at least it's less stressful. I finally give in, let go of the rope...I sink and slowly start to float. The noise settles down, it gets quiet in the water, and I wait for him to circle around to come back for me. But as I watch him drive away I realize he hasn't even noticed I've dropped off. Something else seems to be driving him, and he's distracted by other things. Maybe it's something alluring that I'm not seeing, or maybe he's still looking for that sense of significance he never seems to be able to find, or just the thrill and distraction of a fast ride.*

*This has become a familiar place. Although I think I should wait for him to return, I'd actually rather swim back to the shore and find a place to rest. The major problem with this recurring situation is that we're pretending...pretending we are a good partnership...pretending we are enjoying each other...pretending we are unified and in love with each other when there is little and infrequent physical contact. Although I know he loves me, the pressure of family life, work, and money makes escaping in a fast boat more attractive. He becomes driven to distract himself from something nagging within that he can't put his finger on.*

*He occasionally drives by, and we talk about the kids, his job, the weather and sometimes us. But unless I bring it up, we don't discuss the stuff in our relationship that is keeping us apart...the real stuff between us. In the past, I attempted to get back in the boat to be closer to him, but eventually I would get bumped out while he drove off toward something new. I try to hang on to the rope and try to ski again, but it's futile. I'm tired, my strength is fading, and again, I let go and sink into the water. When the kids were little, it was much easier and enjoyable to all be together. But as the children are in their teen years, we are fortunate to even have a meal together. I see other families in their boats looking*

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*like they're having fun and I can't understand why he would rather drive off by himself. But he says he has a lot on his mind and the time alone helps him think. Besides, he says it's easier to drive the boat alone.*

*Sometimes we join with other boats. We socialize and have a moment of togetherness. But eventually he's off again by himself and I'm back in the water. We both recognize things aren't right, but since it doesn't feel like a real crisis, we don't ask for help from anyone else or share our real feelings with others. But in my desperate moments I look for a lifeguard who can show me what's wrong, or I pick up books on happy family boating, or how to be a better water skier. These efforts sometimes help me for a short while, but ultimately there is little change, and we go back to our familiar ways, like a well-worn path.*

*I get most concerned when I see other boaters getting older who increasingly follow this same pattern as they age. It seems to become easier and easier as the years go by until eventually they have built separate lives, their paths rarely cross, and at best they become roommates, or split up completely. Part of me still desperately wants to be close and intimate with him, but to be honest, I'm afraid of being pushed aside again. Although I know his intent is not to reject me, his preoccupation to distract himself still hurts, and my emotional muscles are getting tired. So, I'm left with the unsatisfying options of getting better at holding on to the rope, faking it, giving up, or building a life for myself in the water, and learning to be content with unsatisfying drive-by conversations. None seem like good choices, and it's a lonely existence.*

This cry for help came from my determination to not feel abandoned. Although this picture I painted seemed true, I also had some unhealthy (and untrue) beliefs and conclusions about relationships: conclusions about trust, security, abandonment, and what I could rely on from another person in those relationships. These beliefs and conclusions were now being triggered by Rob's distraction and indifference.

### *Let's unpack the trailers*

Finally reaching the point when I realized I needed help, one bright morning in 1985, I sat in a counselor's office for the first time. He gently helped me look into my trailer. This set me on the course of discovery and freedom. In the beginning, I wanted to believe I could pray it all away or deny it, but I knew I had some work to do to become free from the lies and triggers that haunted me.

These hurts and expectations had taken up residence in my heart long before we ever got married, and they were showing up in real time and playing out in our relationship in an unhealthy dance pattern we repeated over and over for years. I knew I had areas of growth, and I needed to rewrite some false beliefs, but I was also hoping Rob would be the one person who

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would change all that. I hoped he would be the one who treated me with such unconditional love and care that my insecurities and pain from childhood would finally evaporate. This is a heavy burden to place on another person. I had to unpack my trailer, and Rob had his own trailer of stuff to discover, as you will hear from him.



*(Chapter Sample)*

## CHAPTER 6

# Broken Intimacy

*Roxanne*

This is the hardest chapter for me to write, especially for someone who experienced such brokenness in this area. The term intimacy is often grossly misunderstood, making it even harder for me to define. It's often referred to as *Into-Me-See*, being willing and open to see and to be seen, and this kind of *knowing* takes time to develop. It's the culmination of friendship, safety, acceptance, which then, in a committed relationship, can lead to physical intimacy. No one from my early history really knew and accepted me with all my flaws. I was hoping marriage would be the answer, and Rob certainly knows me better than anyone else in this world, but it also came with almost equal amounts of hurt and rejection.

In our culture today, we see both men and women are confused in this area. In our highly sexualized culture, people look to each other as the primary source of being known and loved and narrowly define intimacy as sex alone. Physical intimacy with another human being is designed by God to be the expression or result of a relationship where two souls meet, commit, and connect emotionally and spiritually at the deepest possible levels.

*Sex is like fire. It's beautiful and warming in the right setting or conditions but deadly and destructive without healthy limits, boundaries, and understanding.*

Most women I speak with want closeness, affection, and safety before sex. It's not that women don't have casual sex (especially for the 30 percent of us who have been abused in this area) it's just not satisfying, meaningful, or even safe without the emotional component. Because of our misunderstandings in this area, many are much more open to being naked physically while keeping their souls fully clothed and hidden. It's not too far off to say most of us are woefully ignorant of God's design for intimacy emotionally, spiritually, and physically. We hide from real love and authenticity mostly because it reveals our fear and vulnerability to being hurt, but we don't express this fear in the same way.

I thought I was an open and honest person, but there were parts of me (especially when we grew apart) I kept hidden from Rob, almost unconsciously. In the book of Genesis, when Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God and from each other. That's when shame entered the equation. I had a fear of intimacy from my history that went beyond sex. Here is a list of some of the signs of fear, which could be true for women or men:

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## ***Fear of Intimacy Symptoms***

Low self-esteem	Trouble forming or committing to close relationships
Trust issues	A history of unstable relationships
Being superficial	Difficulty sharing feelings
Experience episodes of anger	Actively avoid physical contact
Difficulty expressing emotion	Insatiable sexual desire

## ***Roxanne's history of intimacy***

My introduction to sexuality and false intimacy happened when I was just six years old. A boy around twelve years old asked me to play a game with him which then became his way of exploring his own blossoming hormones. I didn't like or understand this game; it almost felt like I was a substitute for a blow-up doll he could practice on. It was weird and uncomfortable but fortunately didn't go too far when my father caught him in the act. The boy was disciplined severely, and I feared the same would happen to me.

Despite all the chaos of our lives at that time, my father handled it compassionately. He assured me it wasn't my fault and what the boy did was wrong and to never let him touch me that way again. I was relieved I wasn't in trouble but still felt a bit of shame and confusion. When sex is introduced to a young child in any form, it causes a crack in their emotional foundation and awakens something that should be fast asleep for years to come.

Fast-forward to my teen years, I still never had a helpful or clear conversation about sex with anyone, except my girlfriends. We just pooled our ignorance, and all we heard was guys wanted it (a lot) and you could get pregnant.

I didn't become a Christian until I was nineteen, and the '60s and '70s were a time of "free love," drugs, and rock and roll. To avoid following in my mother's footsteps, I did not drink or party wildly. I saw what loss of control did to her. Since fear was always rumbling under the surface, I also avoided "going all the way" sexually, fearing I might get pregnant. In my mind, I was sure my father would disown me if I came home with that news. It's not that I wasn't tempted, but fear, doom, and predicting the worst case kept me in line rather than any type of moral compass.

By my junior year of high school, I'd found my voice in many ways and felt reasonably good about how I looked, although I still struggled with my Armenian nose and curly hair. I went to great lengths to straighten it by sleeping on giant rollers and taping my bangs down (no blow-dryers or flat irons in those days). Long straight hair was the style, and fitting in was more important than being yourself or different. My much-older stepsister used to say I was beautifully exotic. Not what I wanted to hear because the girls on the front of *Teen* magazine were blond, blue-eyed, small-nosed Barbie dolls. This goes beyond being stylish but to questioning my worth by how I look. Despite my popularity, I think I was still struggling with my brother's nickname label "*Ugh*".

I threw myself into school clubs, cheerleading, art classes, guitar lessons, and dance. I enjoyed all the arts and the sense of belonging that came with these social events. I liked the vote

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of confidence of being pursued, being liked, and feeling attractive. Maybe I wasn't so ugly after all. I had many boyfriends during high school and college and experimented with affection and "making out," always thinking about where the limits were. Some of these relationships were fun and romantic, going to concerts and out for dinner.

In my sophomore year before I could drive, one friend, who was particularly nice, consistently found me as I walked to school and gave me a ride in his *souped-up* Trans Am. I knew most guys were out for just one thing, but I also formed an immature and idealistic belief that if someone really likes or loves you, he will pursue you, anticipate your needs, and treat you special with pure and selfless motives. This later became an issue in our marriage because Rob had never been treated this way and had no clue how to offer it to me. I had my own broken and confused understanding of love and intimacy, and he had his.

When it came to sex, many of the Christian guys I dated were not much different than the non-Christians even though I was able to stave them off. In my friendliness, they must have interpreted that to mean I was asking, which I wasn't. I concluded all men had sex on the brain no matter how much they claimed to love Jesus. Their hormones and lightning-fast reactions to any visual stimuli are beyond my comprehension and a reality I grossly underestimated. So I thought it unlikely I would find anyone who could be trusted with my heart; I was friendly but kept an arm's length.

In high school and well into our marriage, it never crossed my mind men were so influenced by pornography. Porn was not as available as it is now, but where there's a will, there's a way. When I met Rob, he wasn't like the other guys I dated. He took things slower and never pushed himself on me physically. His steadiness, patience, and sense of humor gradually won me over, but it was a struggle for me since my mind had been so resolute not to get married. He eventually shared with me the baggage of his non-Christian days and the guilt he felt when overly pushy, so he was sincerely trying to do life and dating differently by the time he met me.

When I finally said yes to Rob's proposal and we were married, I felt guilty the first few months about being physically intimate. In my head, I knew it was nothing to feel guilty about, but because I'd said *no* for so many years, it was a major shift to all of a sudden say *yes*. We only dated for about six months before getting married and had been careful to not take our physical intimacy too far. Rob was patient with me and didn't push or demand. Our struggle with emotional and physical intimacy didn't express itself until years later.

Eventually, I felt like the only time he would pursue me and give me his undivided attention was when we were having sex. But did I really have his attention? Sometimes, maybe, but I really didn't know what was going on in his mind. When the truth came out about his struggle with pornography, I thought back on those years and wondered.

True intimacy for me really revolved around trust. Can I trust this person with my heart, or will they stomp on it, even if accidentally? I'm speaking in generalities because there are always exceptions, but for most women, good sex is the result of great connection mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and to many men, it is the only way they know how to connect, or it's simply satisfying a physical urge. We couldn't think more differently on this issue. That's why

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Rob is sharing his thoughts from a man's perspective and I'm commenting from a woman's point of view (at least this woman). With so much shame around the topic of broken intimacy, the discussion is often avoided entirely, and we don't talk about it, leaving us unable to truly understand each other. As a result of this disconnect, we end up with secrets in our lives keeping us sick and further divided.

### ***Owning our distortions***

There is general agreement that certain people have addictive tendencies, contributing to increased risk. Rob acknowledges these addictive factors in his life. He was a risk-taker; he was disconnected from emotion; he was apathetic; he was a loner and took his bearings from what others thought of him. Many people appear to be functional but still can't manage their *-ism*. Rob's addictions not only included compromised sexual integrity but also workaholism, status seeking, and compulsive behavior. He acted out sporadically, and even though these unhealthy coping strategies at times became less or went away altogether, they would return when he was unable to manage stress, disappointment, shame, or grief. When you don't learn how to manage emotions, they will manage you in destructive ways.

That's the tricky part about denial. I've heard so many smokers say, "I could stop anytime I want. I just don't want to." But why? If smoking is your go-to way of managing anxiety, even if it works temporarily, of course you would want to keep smoking. We are all in favor of a quick fix or cure. Have a headache? Here's a pill. Something worse? A stronger pill. It takes a bit of know-how and some courage to face our emotions in a healthy way, which becomes a long-term health plan rather than a quick fix.

Most people dislike being labeled, and there really isn't much need for labels unless we can't face reality. Appropriate labels can become categories of understanding that help form pathways to follow as we grow. The label "Adult Child of an Alcoholic" was coined nearly one hundred years ago, and although I don't like owning the label, I needed to face that fact to grow out from under it. If, for example, the label of *shopaholic* is necessary for me to face my unhealthy ways of living, it's worth it. On the other hand, some people use the label as an excuse or a hall pass for bad behavior. Either way requires taking a hard look at our motives for why we do the things we do and our willingness to make changes.

As we mentioned in the chapter on broken trust, what I feared happened. Rob gave in to avoiding, isolating, workaholism, and pornography because of his broken thinking regarding intimacy and as a result of not knowing how to manage stress in a healthy way. I feared being abandoned, and although he never left me physically, we were miles apart in heart and mind. I often wished we could have been helped when we were much younger so we could have had more years of healthy relating, but I'm thankful we eventually found our way to a better place with honesty, forgiveness, and transparency. Shame and fear are such heavy burdens to bear, and we both carried those loads for far too many years. Our hope is that our pain can be useful in your life and our story will help spare you some of the pain of living lives of quiet discontent or giving up all together.

***Rob: Intimacy Ignorance... Intimacy Intelligence?***

I've already shared the deep influence Larry Crabb had on our journey. When I first met Larry, I knew by his reputation and skill with people there was a high likelihood I wouldn't be able to fool him. He would see through me, like he had X-ray vision for guys like me who were hiding behind a mask. He had worked with hundreds of couples just like us for years, and the closer he got to me, the more my fears were realized. He saw me coming from a hundred miles away. I felt I was wearing a sweatshirt that said, "Clueless," on the front and had flashing Christmas lights around it.

At our first meeting with Larry, we were chatting and getting to know each other, and Roxanne started to cry. Larry quickly and sensitively acknowledged she felt invisible, lonely, and abandoned. Although she minimized these feelings, he saw what was beneath, which is something I had never been particularly good at doing.

Larry turned to me and asked how I thought Roxanne was feeling. He asked if I could see how my behavior triggered memories and wounds from Roxanne's broken family relationships. We talked about what it looks like to love well and what happens when I don't listen, when I don't care for her emotionally, when I'm not present or available. As Roxanne has shared, these wounds were created early in her childhood, long before she ever knew me, but I was touching some of these raw spots. Larry wasn't trying to shame me or blame me. But now, as her husband, I had the opportunity to move toward her with courage, compassion, and understanding to see her as a fellow image-bearer of Christ. He affirmed me for the role I have in her life and that I have the incredible privilege of knowing her in a deep and intimate way that no one else can, other than God Himself.

By allowing her to be alone in our relationship, some would say I had abandoned her and broken our marriage vows. Some might even say this is grounds for divorce. As we spent many more hours together, Larry made it clear how much he supported and defended our marriage covenant, and he was fighting for our survival. He had already identified my "core terror" as feeling weightless, and his intent was to encourage me to wake up and see the gravity of the situation. He has worked with couples a lot stronger than us who didn't make it, and if we didn't want to join the long list of failed marriages, we had some serious work to do.

He also made it clear that we both had a choice. She could choose to hold on to feeling hurt, abandoned, and rejected, and I could choose to continue feeling unwanted, inadequate, and ashamed, or we could accept the invitation to something higher, a relationship not based on broken thinking, expectations, or demands but on a healthy understanding of who God is and who we are. He assured us we weren't alone, and he would join us in the fight.

This became a turning point for us. I started being honest with myself about how I made excuses for not stepping up in the marriage because of what I saw in my parents' roommate-like marriage, my lack of training and experience in healthy expression of sexuality, my belief that love was not freely given but earned, fear of failure, and rationalizing that some secrets are okay. My insecurity of not being able to meet Roxanne's needs perfectly and fear that I was failing at

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love had paralyzed me and blocked me from doing much of anything. I thought I was protecting myself from failure and pain by not trying.

### ***Intimacy ignorance***

A man's heart longs for true intimacy. He deeply desires to know a woman, or any of his closest friends for that matter, truly intimately. The problem is, most men don't have a clue what real intimacy looks like. The men in his life – fathers, uncles, coaches, grandparents, others – have never modeled it for him, abandoning him to his own self-guided journey to understand manhood and masculinity. As already mentioned, most of what is understood as intimacy has been *caught* rather than *taught*, which was true for me as well. Lacking good role models in life who understood true intimacy and masculinity left me watching, waiting, and hoping something would make sense someday or at least create the appearance of intimacy in my important relationships.

Looking carefully at the definition of intimacy, several key characteristics emerge. Intimacy is a combination of closeness (allowing total access to your heart, holding nothing back), privacy (protected and shared only by the two of you), affection (choosing to give and receive love freely and unconditionally), acceptance (loving your partner for who they are, not who you want them to be), and openness (willing to be transparent and vulnerable).

Without a healthy understanding of intimacy, I was groping in the dark, realizing there was so much I didn't understand about this elusive and mysterious concept. I was also afraid someone would see the truth and uncover my intimacy ignorance before I could figure it out.

Most of the men I've worked with over the years share similar stories of how they mentored themselves into manhood, resulting in an unhealthy masculine culture that glorifies a man's power, control, aggression, and competitive nature. This myth of the self-made man compels men to lead lives of isolation, where they become void of deep, meaningful, and intimate relationships. Like many other men, I never asked questions because questions just exposed my intimacy ignorance. I ended up trudging through life harboring an intimacy ignorance that haunted me.

I loved Roxanne with everything I knew about love, but that was the problem. My love knowledge was seriously deficient. I also didn't understand that healthy intimacy is a two-way street meant to be both expressed and received emotionally, intellectually, socially, spiritually, and physically in all our relationships. This is true for men and women. When intimacy is narrowly (and wrongly) defined solely as sexual gratification, it's like pouring water into a bucket with holes. It will never satisfy a man's heart.

It was pivotal for my thinking as I began learning how the influence of healthy intimacy extends beyond just the relationship between a man and a woman. Healthy intimacy in a man's life affects every part of his life and all his relationships. Growing in my understanding of true intimacy, I could see how my intimacy ignorance prepared the soil for the roots of counterfeit intimacy to go deep. My lack of understanding was seriously crippling me, but it didn't let me off the hook for the choices I was making.

# *Hope After Hurt... From Heartache to Healing*

By Roxanne & Rob Maroney

Again, this isn't an excuse, but it does offer an explanation. This lack of understanding is one of the major reasons pornography and other unwanted sexual behavior are so rampant. Men are looking for a way to fill the intimacy void in their lives. We are just looking in the wrong places.

## ***Intimacy intelligence***

Although I deeply wanted a healthier and more intimate relationship, just wanting this was not enough. The deeply rooted barriers in my life undermining my efforts to develop healthy intimacy needed to be exposed and uprooted. These barriers are my faults, my fears, my failures, and my intimacy ignorance. For a man to truly experience healthy intimacy, he needs all five pillars of intimacy to support it: closeness, privacy, affection, acceptance, and openness. These are inseparable, and each one builds on the other. Each one draws strength and confidence from the others.

I've already said healthy relational intimacy is *not* a one-way street. Healthy intimacy flows back and forth, to and from each other. Both men and women need to learn how to receive intimacy as well as express it appropriately. Healthy intimacy is not developed in isolation. When men are in the grip of counterfeit intimacy, they separate from others and isolate. We no longer see them at church, they avoid men's groups, they reject offers to get together for coffee, and their lives of secrecy become all-consuming.

Men, please hear me on this: you cannot do this on your own. You can read about it, you can talk about it all you want, but in the end, you need to join with other trusted men and purposely, patiently, and persistently practice the skills to develop and strengthen healthy intimacy.

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