

Past Experience or Present Concern?

A Free Companion Worksheet from the Married but Feeling Alone Series

Companion Reflection: Part 6: [When Past Hurts Make It Difficult to Open Our Hearts - October 9, 2026](#)

When Earlier Hurts Affect How We Experience Closeness

When someone has hurt us, we may become more alert to the possibility of being hurt again. We might hesitate to share, question another person's intentions, or withdraw when a conversation becomes uncomfortable.

Sometimes a present interaction reminds us of something painful from the past. At other times, our concern reflects something genuinely happening in the marriage, such as repeated dismissal, broken promises, or harsh responses.

Recognizing the influence of past experiences should help us understand the present more clearly—not convince us to overlook current problems.

This worksheet invites you to examine one manageable situation, distinguish what you observed from what you feared, consider whether earlier experiences influenced your response, and identify what you need now.

You do not need to describe painful memories in detail or share your answers with anyone.

A Scripture to Consider

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." —Proverbs 4:23

Ask God for wisdom to recognize what is true and to care for your heart without ignoring either your need for connection or your need for safety.

Part 1 Describe What Happened

Think about a recent, manageable situation in which you felt hurt, uneasy, guarded, or hesitant to open up. You do not need to revisit a traumatic or overwhelming event.

What happened? Describe only what you observed or heard.

For example: "My spouse became quiet after I shared something," rather than "My spouse stopped caring about what I had to say."

PAST EXPERIENCE OR PRESENT CONCERN? | MARRIED BUT FEELING ALONE PART 6

What did I feel during or immediately after the interaction?

What did I find myself thinking about my spouse, myself, or our relationship?

How did I respond?

For example: I became quiet, asked repeated questions, changed the subject, explained myself, or decided not to share anything further.

Part 2 Separate What You Know From What You Fear

When something feels threatening, we may quickly assign meaning to another person’s words or behavior. Sometimes our interpretation is accurate. At other times, we may not yet have enough information.

What I know happened	What I fear or believe it may mean

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Part 2 Separate What You Know From What You Fear (continued)

What evidence from this interaction supports my concern?

Is there information I do not yet have that could help me understand the situation?

Has my spouse behaved similarly before? If so, what happened on those occasions?

You do not need to question your observations simply because a concern involves fear. Repeated present behavior may provide important information about what you can reasonably expect.

Part 3 Consider the Influence of Earlier Experiences

Sometimes a present situation reminds us of an earlier relationship in which we felt rejected, criticized, betrayed, or unsafe. You may recognize a connection immediately, or not identify one at all. Either response is okay.

Does this situation remind me of an earlier experience? ☐ Yes ☐ Possibly ☐ No ☐ I am not sure

If an earlier experience comes to mind, what does the present situation remind me of?

PAST EXPERIENCE OR PRESENT CONCERN? | MARRIED BUT FEELING ALONE PART 6

Part 3 Consider the Influence of Earlier Experiences (continued)

You may describe the similarity without writing down details of the earlier event.

What did I come to expect from other people because of that earlier experience?

For example: “When someone becomes quiet, I expect anger,” or “If I share something personal, I expect it to be used against me.”

Is that expectation supported by what is happening in my marriage now?

Consider your spouse’s actual behavior over time rather than relying only on one interaction.

What might be different about the present situation? What might be similar?

An earlier experience may heighten your response to a present concern without making that concern unreasonable. Both your history and your current circumstances deserve thoughtful attention.

PAST EXPERIENCE OR PRESENT CONCERN? | MARRIED BUT FEELING ALONE PART 6

Part 4 Recognize What You Need in the Present

Rather than deciding that you must either trust completely or withdraw entirely, consider what you need to understand the situation and respond wisely.

What would help me understand what happened?

For example: clarification, time to reflect, an opportunity to explain my feelings, or a conversation about a recurring pattern.

What would help me feel more comfortable sharing my thoughts or feelings?

Consider specific responses such as being heard without interruption, having personal information treated respectfully, or seeing consistent follow-through.

Is there a present-day concern that needs to be addressed before I consider becoming more open?

PAST EXPERIENCE OR PRESENT CONCERN? | MARRIED BUT FEELING ALONE PART 6

Part 4 Recognize What You Need in the Present (continued)

What would help me recognize whether my spouse is responding with care and trustworthiness?

Trust does not have to be extended all at once. It can develop through repeated experiences of honesty, care, and dependable behavior.

If your spouse has repeatedly violated your trust, rebuilding may require acknowledgment of the harm, meaningful behavioral change, and additional support. You do not need to become more vulnerable to demonstrate willingness to work on the relationship.

Part 5 Consider a Wise Next Step

You might ask a clarifying question, communicate a small part of your experience, take time to reflect, address a recurring concern, or seek support.

One thing I understand more clearly about my response to this situation is:

One thing I still need to understand about what is happening in the present is:

PAST EXPERIENCE OR PRESENT CONCERN? | MARRIED BUT FEELING ALONE PART 6

Part 5 Consider a Wise Next Step (continued)

A next step I would like to consider is:

What would help me determine whether this step is appropriate for my circumstances?

If you choose to communicate, you might begin with one of these statements:

“When _____ happened, I felt _____. I may not fully understand what was happening, and I would like to talk about it.”

“When _____ continues to happen, I find it difficult to feel comfortable sharing. I need _____ before I can consider becoming more open.”

You do not need to use either statement if it does not fit. The purpose is to identify what you want to communicate—not pressure you into a conversation before you are ready.

Part 6 What I Want to Carry Forward

One thing I learned about how earlier experiences or present concerns may influence my willingness to trust is:

PAST EXPERIENCE OR PRESENT CONCERN? | MARRIED BUT FEELING ALONE PART 6

Part 6 What I Want to Carry Forward (continued)

One thing I want to remember about caring for my heart while considering opportunities for connection is:

My prayer as I consider my next step:

Explore the Companion Reflection

This worksheet can be completed on its own. For a deeper exploration of how earlier relational wounds can influence trust, vulnerability, and emotional connection, read [When Past Hurts Make It Difficult to Open Our Hearts - October 9, 2026](#), part of the Married but Feeling Alone Reflection series.

You may complete this worksheet individually and keep your answers private. If you share them, you can decide what and how much to disclose. You do not need to revisit painful memories, dismiss present concerns, or extend trust before trustworthiness has been established.