

## RECOGNIZING OUR PROTECTIVE PATTERNS

*A Companion Worksheet for the Married but Feeling Alone Series*

Free Download

This worksheet accompanies the Reflections for Christian Living [When Self-Protection Keeps Us Apart — September 25, 2026](#). Read the Reflection for deeper teaching about how fear, hurt, and attachment experiences can shape the ways we pursue, defend, or withdraw.

Protective responses often begin as attempts to avoid rejection, conflict, shame, or emotional overwhelm. They may help us feel safer for a moment while making it harder for our spouse to understand what is happening within us. Use this worksheet to notice your pattern without excusing harmful behavior or blaming yourself for having learned to protect what feels vulnerable.

### 1 Notice What Activates Your Protection

Think of a recent interaction in which you became defensive, critical, urgent, quiet, distant, or shut down.

| What Happened                            | What I Felt or Feared        | How I Protected Myself        |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Example: My spouse sounded disappointed. | I feared I had failed again. | I defended and overexplained. |
|                                          |                              |                               |

### 2 Trace the Cycle Between You

Our protective responses can activate one another. Map one familiar cycle without deciding who started it or who is more at fault.

| What I Do                       | How My Spouse Responds     | What Happens Next                |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Example: I press for an answer. | My spouse becomes quieter. | I feel ignored and press harder. |
|                                 |                            |                                  |

## RECOGNIZING OUR PROTECTIVE PATTERNS

*Married but Feeling Alone Series*

### 3 Reveal What Is Beneath the Protection

Complete the statements slowly. Focus on your internal experience rather than your spouse's motives.

**When I feel \_\_\_\_\_, I tend to protect myself by:**

---

**What I am afraid might happen is:**

---

**What I most want my spouse to understand is:**

---

**A clearer and more responsible way I could say this is:**

---

### 4 Create a Pause and Return Plan

A pause can protect connection when it includes reassurance and a specific plan to return. Complete this before the next difficult conversation.

**Words I can use when I notice myself becoming overwhelmed:**

---

**How long I usually need to settle myself:**

---

**How I will reassure my spouse and name a specific return time:**

---

### A Scripture to Carry With You

"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor." —  
Ephesians 4:25, ESV

What would speaking truth with both honesty and grace look like in your next difficult interaction?

---

### A Brief Prayer

Father, reveal the fear beneath my defenses. Give me courage to speak honestly, humility to listen, and grace to stay present. Help us replace fear-driven reactions with truth and growing connection. Amen.

*If your marriage involves intimidation, coercion, threats, violence, or abuse, prioritize safety and seek qualified professional support before attempting vulnerable conversation exercises.*