

# Week 3 Assignment – Differentiation in Marriage

*Inspired by the family systems work of Murray Bowen, MD*

## **Purpose**

This assignment is where confidence begins to replace anxiety. This is not about fixing your marriage or managing your partner. It is about learning how to stay yourself in moments that usually pull you off center.

## **Important Instruction**

Do not try to do this perfectly. This work is effective precisely because it is practiced in ordinary moments, not dramatic ones.

## **PART 1 – Identify Your Pull**

Think about the last week. When tension or discomfort showed up, what did you feel pulled to do? Choose the one that fits most often.

Explain more • Fix • Withdraw • Take responsibility • Smooth things over • Shut down • Get louder • Get quieter

Write your answer below:

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**PART 2 – Name Your Usual Move**

Finish this sentence honestly, without softening it:

**When tension rises, I usually try to:**

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### **PART 3 – The Differentiated Alternative**

Now imagine the same moment, but instead of reacting automatically, you stayed present and steady.

Finish these sentences:

Instead of reacting, I could pause and:

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Staying myself in that moment would look like:

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**PART 4 – Tolerating Discomfort**

Differentiation requires tolerating discomfort without acting it out.

Answer honestly:

What discomfort do I usually try to get rid of quickly?

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What happens when I let that discomfort exist without fixing it?

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**PART 5 – One Live Practice This Week**

Choose one ordinary interaction this week where you will practice staying yourself.

Describe the situation you will practice in:

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What will you remind yourself in that moment?

*Example: I can stay present without explaining or fixing.*

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**PART 6 – Reflection**

After the interaction, write a few sentences about what you noticed.

Not what changed in the other person — what changed in you.

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With gratitude for the foundational insights of Murray Bowen, MD

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