

Week 4 – When It Feels Like You’re Growing Apart

Why This Moment Is Often Developmental, Not a Failure

Before we begin, let’s take a moment to look back.

Last week, we talked about differentiation — staying yourself without disappearing or cutting off.

The assignment asked you to notice moments where you usually collapse, rescue, explain, or withdraw,

and to practice staying steady instead.

If you did that work, even a little, you may have noticed something unsettling.

Things felt different.

Quieter.

Less reactive.

Less glued together.

And for many people, that’s when a familiar fear shows up.

The fear sounds like this:

“We’re growing apart.”

“Something is slipping away.”

“I don’t know how to get us back.”

This week exists to help you understand that fear — not to dismiss it, but to place it correctly.

Here is the most important thing I want you to hear:

Feeling like you’re growing apart does not automatically mean the marriage is failing.

Very often, it means the marriage is entering a new developmental stage.

Over the years, careful observers of marriage noticed that relationships don’t stay the same.

They move through stages.

Each stage asks something different of the people in it.

When those stages aren’t understood, people panic at exactly the wrong moment.

Let's walk through these stages simply and concretely.

Stage One – Fit and Fusion

In the early stage of marriage, things often feel easy.

Roles fit.

Needs are met.

Differences don't feel threatening.

People feel close because:

someone explains,

someone reassures,

someone carries the emotional load,

someone smooths things over.

This stage often feels like love.

But it's also fragile.

Vignette – Stage One

A couple rarely argues.

When tension shows up, one person quickly reassures.

The other relaxes.

They tell themselves:

“We’re good. We don’t have problems.”

What’s actually happening is that anxiety is being managed — not yet challenged.

Stage Two – Pressure and Awakening

Over time, something shifts.

One or both people start to feel constrained.

Old roles feel heavy.

What once felt loving starts to feel limiting.

This is often when people begin to differentiate.

They explain less.

They rescue less.

They take more internal responsibility.

And suddenly, the old closeness changes.

Vignette – Stage Two

One partner stops smoothing things over.

They pause instead of explaining.

The other partner feels it immediately and thinks:

“Why are you pulling away?”

But what’s actually happening is growth, not abandonment.

Stage Three – Panic and Misinterpretation

This is the stage most people mistake for failure.

The old glue is gone.

The new way of connecting isn't built yet.

Distance becomes visible.

Silence feels louder.

People think:

"We're growing apart."

"We've lost the spark."

"This shouldn't feel this way."

Vignette – Stage Three

A person feels calmer internally than they ever have.

But the marriage feels awkward.

They panic:

"If I don't fix this now, it will be too late."

This is where many people undo their growth.

Here is the reassurance:

This stage is uncomfortable precisely because it is honest.

No one is propping things up.

No one is disappearing.

Reality is being revealed.

Stage Four – Rebuilding on New Ground

This stage comes later, and it cannot be rushed.

Here, connection is rebuilt not through roles,

but through presence.

People relate as two solid individuals.

Closeness becomes chosen, not required.

This stage feels quieter — and much more real.

Vignette – Stage Four

Two people sit together.

No one rushes.

No one explains.

There is space.

There is choice.

There is respect.

This is intimacy without fusion.

What People Need at Each Stage

Stage One needs appreciation.

Stage Two needs courage.

Stage Three needs patience.

Stage Four needs trust.

Most people panic at Stage Three because they don't know Stage Four exists.

So if you are feeling distance right now,

and you are doing the work of staying yourself,

do not rush to label what's happening.

Ask instead:

“What stage might we be in?”

That question alone can save a marriage — or help you leave one with integrity.

This week is not about fixing closeness.

It is not about recreating the past.

It is about allowing development.

The assignment that follows will help you identify:

which stage feels most familiar right now,

what you are tempted to do when panic shows up,

and how to protect the steadiness you've built.

For now, remember this:

Growing apart emotionally is not always loss.

Sometimes it is the space required for something more honest to emerge.

Next week, we will talk about meaning —

what people expect marriage to give them,

and how disappointment is often misread.

For now, stay steady.