

Sacred Spaces ★ Discussion Guide

INTRODUCTION TO SACRED SPACES

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FROM AUTHOR CORIE WEATHERS

*M*arriages are built and solidified through the moments, both large and small, a couple experiences together: from becoming parents to enjoying a picnic, from facing health challenges to making up after a disagreement. Shared life-changing events, both joyous and painful, become shared **sacred spaces** in a marriage.

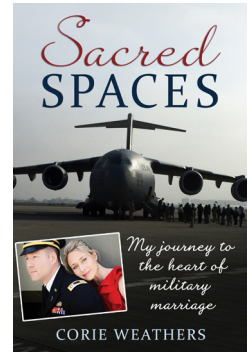
Because of the various separations military life requires, military couples have a unique relationship-building challenge: We experience many milestone events separately, forming sacred spaces while we are apart. Even when we do our best to remain connected through these separations, gaps of misunderstanding can accumulate around our separate experiences. As a professional counselor who has worked with many military couples, I have seen the consequences of these physical and emotional separations in my clients. As a military wife, I have seen the consequences in my relationship with my husband, Matt, an Army chaplain. After multiple deployments, we became aware of gaps forming in our marriage because of the intense, life-changing experiences we each had while apart.

In *Sacred Spaces: My Journey to the Heart of Military Marriage*, I write about my trip to several deployment locations, including one where my husband spent a pivotal time. When I was able to see, smell, hear, and taste some of what Matt experienced during his deployments, I had a clearer picture of those events in his life. I couldn't go back and walk those paths with him, but I could reach across the space they had created between us. I could pursue my husband's heart by actively seeking a better understanding of the way he was shaped by his experiences. This is one way to close the gaps formed by our separate sacred spaces.

Another way Matt and I counterbalance the sacred spaces caused by our separate experiences is to create more significant moments together. Sacred spaces—multi-sensory experiences that are significant and life-changing—cause distance when experienced separately, and they create stronger bonds when experienced jointly. With intentionality, we can make room for more shared sacred spaces in our relationships.

I invite you to join me on a journey to the heart of *your* military marriage. It doesn't take traveling to the other side of the world to want your marriage to be stronger. It begins with you taking the first step, intentionally pursuing your spouse's heart.

Intentionality matters. Being intentional means making a voluntary, deliberate choice or action. In the context of this book, it means taking action to close the gaps in your marriage. *Sacred Spaces: My Journey to the Heart of Military Marriage* and this companion discussion guide will challenge you to be more intentional in your relationship with your spouse. Intentionality will look different for each person and for each set of circumstances. For everyone, though, the goal is a change of heart, a willingness to take a step toward your spouse.



Sacred spaces are multi-sensory, significant or life-changing experiences. They are set apart from mundane day-to-day moments and hold an important place in the life story of an individual.

A sacred space can bond those who share an experience together, or it may cause misunderstanding between those who do not share it.

In this guide, you will find discussion questions and suggested activities for each chapter, which will lead you to:

- » Identify the unshared sacred spaces in your marriage.
- » Leverage empathy to hear and understand your spouse's stories and communicate your own more effectively.
- » Create more shared sacred spaces with your spouse.

Questions for each chapter are directed to spouses together and individually, based on their experiences at home and on deployment. This guide can be used by those who want to delve into the concepts of *Sacred Spaces* individually, as a couple, or in a group setting.

Reading through *Sacred Spaces* and discussing it will reinforce the concepts and principles found in the story. A small group can provide a safe place for participants to process thoughts and feelings, as well as encouragement and accountability to bring change to their marriages.

If you are reading *Sacred Spaces* on your own, and your spouse is not reading it, you can use discussion questions as conversation starters with your spouse. Respect his or her boundaries, and don't demand answers. Reserve questions for when your spouse is open and willing to talk. More complicated or intense discussions may require the help of a professional.

Build trust. Marriage is not easy. It is a lifelong covenant that requires courage, vulnerability, and a constant willingness to grow. It can be challenging when times are difficult and rewarding during seasons of joy. In this book, I've shared my story and how it changed my perspective of our marriage. Opening up to share your story requires trust and opens the door to greater freedom and growth. Whether you are discussing with a group or with your spouse, here are a few things to remember:

1. You will discuss significant and life-changing moments. Treat these with the utmost respect, even if you cannot relate or understand a particular experience.
 - » Listen intently without interrupting.
 - » Validate one another when sharing. Give reassurance that significant life moments are being heard and accepted.
 - » Recommend professional help as needed for issues that surface from traumatic events.
2. Never share another person's story outside of the group. Everyone's sacred space and story is his or her own.
3. If you are discussing in a group setting, discuss first with your spouse to determine what you are both comfortable sharing with other members.

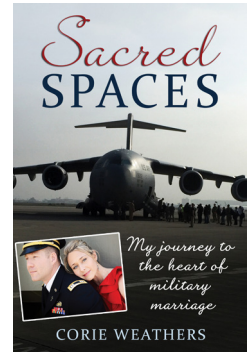
Thank you for joining me on this journey!

Sincerely,



Corie Weathers, LPC

Author of *Sacred Spaces: My Journey to the Heart of Military Marriage*



This **Sacred Spaces Discussion Guide** will help you:

- » Identify the unshared sacred spaces in your marriage.
- » Leverage empathy to hear and understand your spouse's stories and communicate your own more effectively.
- » Create more shared sacred spaces with your spouse.

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Sacred Spaces ★ Discussion Guide

SACRED SPACES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Based on the book *Sacred Spaces: My Journey to the Heart of Military Marriage* by Corie Weathers

OVERVIEW

Questions and activities in this guide are designed especially for readers of *Sacred Spaces: My Journey to the Heart of Military Marriage* by Corie Weathers, published by Elva Resa. As you read each section, use the corresponding discussion starters to enrich your understanding and strengthen your relationship with your spouse.

Questions are suggested “For the Military Spouse,” “For the Service Member,” or “For Both Spouses.” If both spouses are service members, choose the questions appropriate to each person’s experience at home and on deployment.

As a couple, you can follow the discussion guide verbally together; or you can begin separately, writing down your answers then coming together to discuss them. Each chapter also includes a suggested activity to create shared sacred spaces.

Even if you are participating in a group discussion of this book, your relationship will benefit most from working through the questions as a couple first in preparation for the group discussion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

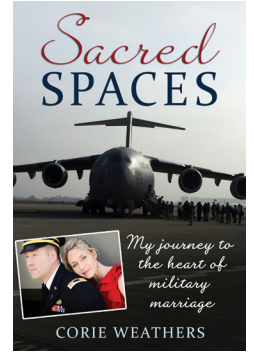
★ PROLOGUE ★ Mind the Gaps: Military couples often miss large chunks of life together. These times may include intense, life changing experiences.

For the Military Spouse:

1. If you were given the opportunity to go overseas to a deployment location, what would you hope to see and experience?

2. Describe a time you tried to visualize your service member’s experience during deployment and later realized your idea was inaccurate.

3. In what specific ways has your spouse supported you in military life professionally or personally? What does he or she do during times of transition that is especially helpful?



“I no longer wanted to believe the gaps could never be closed. I wanted a better answer. I was ready to stop avoiding the space between my husband and me.”

— p. 21

For the Service Member:

1. If your spouse had the opportunity to visit one of your deployment or training locations, what would you most want him or her to see and understand?

2. What are some of the ways deployed life is different from family life at home? How do you describe these differences to civilians or to your family?

3. In what specific ways has your spouse supported you during your military career, professionally or personally? How has your spouse eased your transition when leaving or coming home from military trainings and separations?

For Both Spouses:

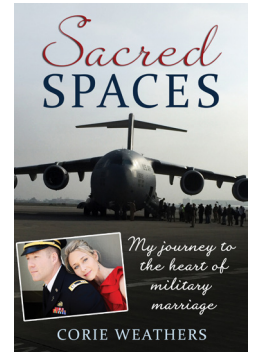
1. What significant life-changing moments have shaped you as a person?

2. In what ways are you proud of your spouse and what he or she has accomplished during your military life to this point?

3. At the end of the prologue, on page 10, Corie writes, "As I packed my bags and prepared for this journey, I knew that if I wanted to see my marriage differently, I'd have to leave behind my resentment." What do you need to leave behind to lighten your load on this journey?

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

Plan a date night out or at home after the kids go to bed. Taste a new food together or share your favorite dish. Ask positive questions throughout the dinner. Talking face-to-face and holding hands can open hearts and ears, and create opportunity for a significant shared moment.



“Matt had no way to understand my experience. He had placed his friends’ remains in body bags, and there was definitely no way I could understand *that*. We desperately needed the other to understand. Yet we hit a wall when we tried.”

—p. 18

★ **HEEDING THE CALL** ★ Identify Your Sacred Spaces: Sacred spaces are significant or life-changing experiences that hold an important place in the life story of an individual. A sacred space can bond those who share an experience, or it may cause misunderstanding between those who do not share it.

For Both Spouses:

1. Think of a strong positive memory. How many of your five senses played a part in remembering that story? What do you remember smelling, tasting, seeing, hearing, or feeling in your body? Try the same exercise with a difficult memory. *CAUTION:* This question can bring up anxiety and symptoms of post-traumatic stress for those who've experienced trauma.

2. What emotions come with these sensations?

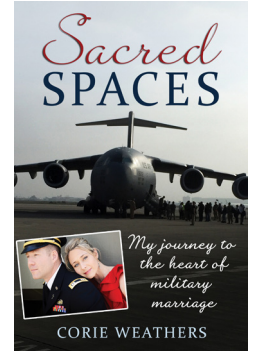
3. These moments are very likely sacred spaces. Which ones were shared moments with your spouse? Which were shared with others?

4. Have you and your spouse navigated around many unshared significant sacred spaces due to separations? How have you handled them up to this point?

5. Have you ever tried to tell your spouse about an important sacred space of your own and felt that he or she didn't care or wasn't listening? Give an example.

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

Take turns sharing a positive sacred space created in each of your lives when you were apart. Face each other, hold hands, and intentionally listen to each other. Be willing to listen all the way through, empathizing as best you can. At the end of sharing, ask each other if you feel heard and understood. Continue the conversation until the answer is "yes."



“Relationships are strengthened by shared experience, especially significant ones. Deployment, by its very nature, creates highly significant yet separate experiences for military couples. After Matt came home, we were surprised by how many sacred moments we had each collected while apart..”
—p. 19

★ **RIPPING OFF THE BAND-AID/DEPARTURE** ★ Push and Pull:
 The days leading up to a deployment departure are full of contrasting emotions. Families dread the moment of separation, yet long for the moment to be over, for the goodbyes to be done. While they want to enjoy every second remaining before departure, sometimes it seems better to rip off the Band-Aid.

For the Military Spouse:

1. What emotions do you associate with the days leading up to a deployment? Name as many as you can.

2. Put yourself in your service member’s boots. Using as many of your five senses as possible, describe the experience of deployment preparation from his or her perspective. What might your spouse need from you during this time?

For the Service Member:

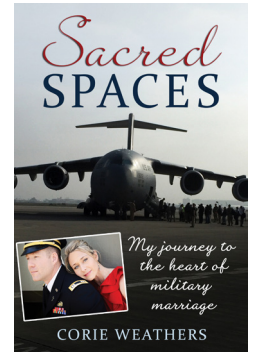
1. When leaving for deployment or training, how do you prepare yourself for the mission? How do you prepare yourself to say goodbye to your family?

2. Put yourself in your spouse’s shoes. Using as many of your five senses as possible, describe the experience of deployment preparation from his or her perspective. What might your spouse need from you during this time?

For Both Spouses:

1. How difficult is it for you to serve your spouse or be served when tensions are high?

2. Part of being intentional is taking what life hands you and finding purpose in it. As Matt and Corie like to say, “Everything is grist for the mill.” What challenges in your life today can you approach with a “make everything count” attitude?

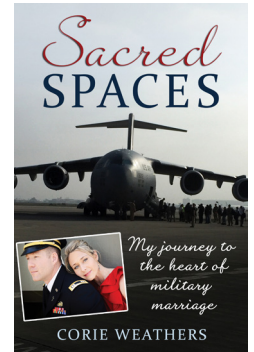


“There is no one right way to prepare for a goodbye, because it is not separate from the other stressors of life. Departure doesn’t wait for perfect timing in a family’s life. It just shows up.”
 —pp. 26-27

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

Plan an adventure together. It doesn't have to be elaborate or pricey. For example, go on a scavenger hunt of historical landmarks, or find locations reminiscent of your relationship story. If your first date was at a coffee shop, try to find a local coffee shop that reminds you of your first date. If you like to run, walk, or cycle, map out local trails and schedule a time to explore them together. By planning and doing something fun, mentally stimulating, and active, you can create lasting memories together.

★ **FAMILY BONDS** ★ *Mission Essential:* The more information and understanding families have about a deployment environment and mission, the more supportive they can be of their service members. The spouses Corie met at Incirlik, Turkey, seemed to have a better understanding of deployment, because they could see and hear the mission happening on their installation every day.



For the Military Spouse:

1. On pages 37 and 38, Corie writes that the military families she met in Turkey told her they felt they were witnessing a deployment up close, because of the military operations taking place at their installation. If you have not been in that situation, what aspects of deployment are difficult to picture?

2. Military families are often told they are an essential part of their service members' readiness. Do you agree? How might the health of a military family or marriage affect the readiness of the military service member?

3. Imagine walking in your spouse's boots. What participation in family decisions did he or she have to give up during separation? Why might that be difficult to relinquish?

For the Service Member:

1. How does your spouse's support contribute to the success of your mission?

2. What participation in family decisions do you have to give up while separated for a training or deployment? Which of these is the most difficult and why?

“The families [at Incirlik, Turkey] shared the stresses and risk and saw the everyday work their spouses did on the front lines. The evidence was as near as the flight line, as loud as the roar of jet engines, as tangible as the odor of a flight suit.”
—p. 37

3. Give an example of a time your spouse handled something at home in a way that made you proud.

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

Laughter is one way to create a multi-sensory shared sacred space. Plan time together where you both agree to not talk about anything serious or make any vital decisions. Reminisce about some of your funniest experiences together over the years.

★ VISIONS IN A C-17 ★ A Different Viewpoint: After a long absence, it may take time for a couple to recognize each other’s needs and reconcile. Corie writes that after deployment, Matt needed a place to rest physically, emotionally, and spiritually. “I had grown accustomed to doing things my way... Getting to know each other again and learning to live in sync took time.”—pp. 55-56

For the Military Spouse:

1. Describe any changes you noticed in your spouse when he or she returned from deployment.

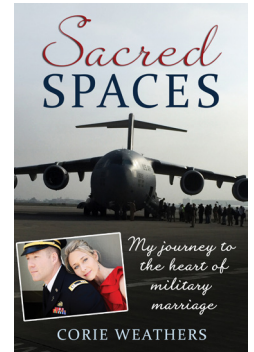
2. Think through your spouse’s reintegration after deployment. What do you imagine your spouse needed most from family after returning home?

3. Did you have fears or needs you did not know how to talk about? What might you have done differently?

4. What differences, if any, have you noticed between your spouse’s perspective on life and yours following deployments and separations?

For the Service Member:

1. When you returned home, did you sense that deployment affected your view of the world, your family, your life? If so, how did your view seem different?



“How strange that I could live like nothing was happening in the world beyond the stress going on in our little home... I wondered if Matt had a sense, when he was flying across the ocean, that he was joining something much larger than himself.”
—p. 32

2. Describe any changes you noticed in your spouse when you returned home from deployment.

3. After an extended absence, what did you need most from your family in order to reintegrate smoothly into life at home?

4. Think through your reintegration experiences. What do you imagine your spouse may have needed most from you when you came home?

For Both Spouses:

1. Read what Corie says about her fears on the bottom half of page 47. Does this resonate with you? What role has fear played in your marriage? Has it kept you from being vulnerable?

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

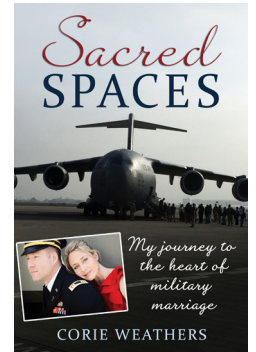
Take a yoga class together or follow a couple's yoga routine at home. Yoga teaches you how to take control of your body, breathing, and mind all at once. It teaches you principles of self-control that you can use during times of conflict and anxiety. Create a memory of the relaxed feeling you accomplish together.

★ FULL CIRCLE ★ Marriage as a No-Fail Mission: "This is a no-fail mission," said one (pilot). "There is a backup for everything." —p. 67

For Both Spouses:

1. Are there some aspects of the deployment experience you enjoy or describe as positive? If so, are you comfortable sharing this with your spouse? Why or why not?

2. As described in this chapter, what is a no-fail mission? What has to be in place to ensure a mission does not fail?



“Would I allow fear to convince me to be a victim or would I choose courage to experience the joy of connection?”
—p. 47

3. List some ways you can provide back-up and support for one another, during deployment and at home.

4. If you see your spouse’s mission, either at home or on deployment, in a positive way, how does that affect your support for him or her?

5. How would you approach your marriage differently if you treated it like a no-fail mission?

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

The Five-Minute Eye Contact Challenge: For five minutes, stare into each other’s eyes without talking. Do not look away. Do not talk. Just look. If you can get past the giggling, there is something wonderful that happens on the other side. Aim for five minutes, but keep looking as long as you can. Then talk about what you discovered through this challenge.

★ EMBRACING THE SUCK ★ Pushing Through Difficulty: “Embrace the suck” is a term often used in military life to describe the acceptance of less than ideal conditions, particularly during a mission. Every important task includes a challenge. Embrace it.

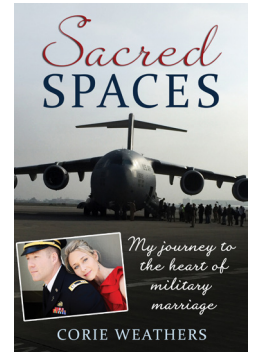
For the Military Spouse:

1. What conditions of training or deployment has your service member described? Stop and think through, step by step, what it might be like to maneuver through his or her day. What do you think would be most challenging?

2. Describe a time when you had to “embrace the suck” and tackle something difficult at home. Did this create a sacred space for you?

For the Service Member:

1. What do you imagine “embracing the suck” involves for your spouse at home? Stop



“[E]very couple needs to recognize each other’s struggles, instead of trying to decide who has a harder job... Each is totally different from the other, requiring every bit from each person. We are dependent on each other for success.”
—p. 73

and think through, step by step, what it might be like to maneuver through his or her day. What do you think would be most challenging?

2. Have you tried to explain to family members the reason you have to deploy, the issues of the region that influence your presence there? Does the other person's reaction or interest level impact how you view yourself or your mission?

For Both Spouses:

1. What does "embracing the suck" mean to you? Describe a time you had to push through something uncomfortable when you felt there was no other option.

2. Share your answers to what you envision "embracing the suck" is like for your spouse. Compare your impressions. Talk about why your impressions of each other's challenges might not match up.

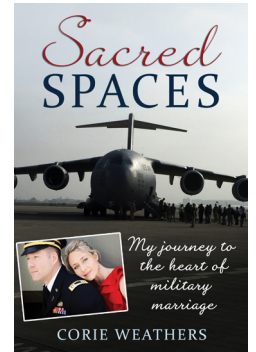
Create a Shared Sacred Space:

All you need is a blindfold. One person wears the blindfold, while the other, as navigator, provides only verbal instructions to help the blindfolded spouse walk safely from point A to point B. (Please choose a safe route without dangerous obstacles!) The navigator should stand close enough to give physical help if necessary. Switch roles. Talk about how you used your senses to complete the journey and the level of communication and trust that was necessary for success.

★ MOUNTAINS OF GRIEF ★ The Sacred Spaces of War: After her husband's unit in Afghanistan took multiple losses, Corie writes, "I heard the strain in Matt's voice on the phone, I knew the deployment would not get easier. I began to worry about the toll the year would take on Matt. He had to walk more closely with death than we had imagined." —p. 82

For the Military Spouse:

1. If your service member experienced significant or traumatic events during deployment, how did you feel about being unable to be there with him or her?



"Matt and I did not experience that loss in the same way or to the same degree.

I had never experienced such loss... Matt was going through something I couldn't share, and I didn't know how to handle it."

—p. 93

2. How have your service member's sacred spaces impacted his or her view of life, death, friendship, and loyalty?

3. Was there a moment during reintegration when you realized life was different somehow? Describe that moment. What happened that brought this realization?

For the Service Member:

1. Have you experienced something you believe the average American, or your family, would not understand? If so, what impact might this have on your relationships?

2. In the book, Matt describes wanting to protect Corie from his experiences in war. Does this give voice to any hesitancy you have in sharing your sacred spaces with your spouse? Why or why not?

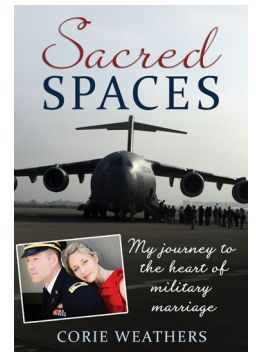
Create a Shared Sacred Space:

Have you and your spouse tried to share some of the most painful sacred spaces you experienced while apart? If you are able, share some of those experiences now. For the listening spouse: Show that you have done your best to listen and respect these sacred spaces by repeating the words your spouse uses to describe his or her sacred space. Ask what you could do to effectively communicate respect, and commit to follow through. It may take more than one attempt to complete this activity. This is a tough assignment, but one that will surely speak volumes to the spouse who feels heard.

★ **WHERE THE PEBBLE FELL** ★ Sacred Spaces at Home: Battlefield losses are also felt by military families at home. Regarding her visit to Afghanistan, Corie writes, "I may not have touched a dead body, but death had a ripple effect in my life and in our community, and I was standing as close as I would ever get to where the pebble fell."—p. 110

For the Military Spouse:

1. For Matt and Corie, Afghanistan was the place where their family and community was impacted the most. Do you have a place like that? Is related to deployment?



“We listen to our soldiers recount trauma and combat. We see them come home different...We sit with families who ache to be where it all ended for their husband, wife, son, or daughter.”
—pp. 109-110

2. Did you experience any of your own sacred spaces at home during deployment? What was it about these moments that set them apart from everyday experience? What change did these moments create in you?

For the Service Member:

1. On page 99, Corie describes a communications blackout after an incident during Matt's deployment. Have you experienced this kind of blackout or other situations where you were not able to communicate with your spouse while on deployment? How do you imagine a blackout like this would look and feel for your spouse?

2. How do you feel when your spouse talks about sacred spaces and challenges he or she faced at home while you were gone? Why? What are the most productive ways your spouse can share these feelings with you?

For Both Spouses:

1. Listen to each other talk about your sacred spaces. Share with each other ways you can help the other feel heard and respected. Avoid comparing your sacred spaces.

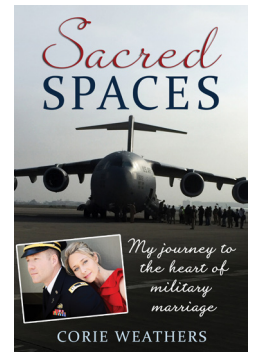
Create a Shared Sacred Space:

Sit down together, and each of you tell the other all the things he or she does well. Take turns saying good things about each other, sharing the ways each meets essential needs for the other. Hold hands and look into each other's eyes as you share positive traits.

★ **ROLE REVERSAL** ★ Essential Community: Appropriate support from friends and community can encourage couples during deployment. Community support should continue for both spouses even after deployment, but should not replace or hinder a couple's communication with each other.

For the Military Spouse:

1. What are the positives and negatives about the current level of connectivity, via phone, video chat, and social media, available during separations?



“There is a balance in maintaining a couple's need for each other during a separation, instead of turning it off. Finding ways to continue to rely on each other makes reintegration much easier.”
—p. 119

2. How has your family or the community played a part in serving you or providing support during difficult times and/or holidays?

3. Who has played a vital role in any of your sacred spaces not shared with your spouse?

4. Deployment requires a level of independence for military spouses at home. After deployment, how do you regain balance of family responsibilities with your spouse?

For the Service Member:

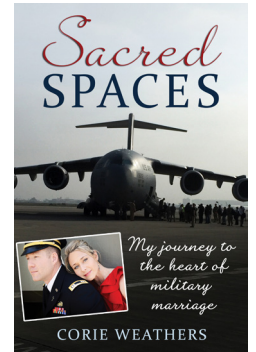
1. How does connectivity, via phone, video chat, or social media, play a part in feeling connected to family during deployment? Describe the benefits and challenges of remaining connected during a deployment.

2. How does the strength or weakness of your spouse's support network at home affect your ability to focus on your mission when you are away?

3. Describe the role of community in your own sacred spaces. Describe the bonds that exist between you and those who were there with you when a sacred space was formed.

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

Having a positive community around you as a couple is very important. In military life, this may include friends who don't live near you, but are still an important part of your support network. Friendships both near and far are worth preserving. Schedule a dinner or event with family or friends you both trust and enjoy. Consider a video chat get-together with good friends who live far away. Enjoy laughing and catching up. Talk about times you have supported each other and about sacred spaces you have shared.



“We have all been affected by war. I didn't have anyone to blame for what had been introduced in our lives. It was life, war, and brokenness. But as the day progressed, I had also been reminded of what was given to us: friends forged through pain, a family to belong to, perspective on living, and a community to share our individual sacred spaces with.”

—p. 126

★ **POWERFUL INFLUENCE** ★ **Life-Giving Support:** Spouses have the power to instill confidence in each other through support, enthusiasm, and understanding for each other's calling. This is life-giving support.

For the Military Spouse:

1. Family members often miss out on seeing their service member's satisfaction in executing their duties with excellence. What aspects of your service member's job are most interesting, exciting, meaningful, or impressive to you?

2. Describe an aspect of your own job or your role at home with your family that brings you joy or allows you to use your special talents.

For the Service Member:

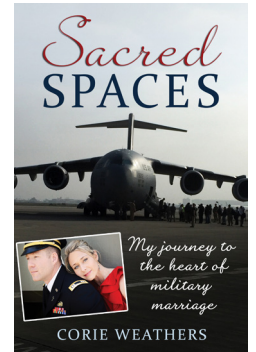
1. Describe an aspect of your job that brings you excitement and joy, using as many of your five senses as possible. How does it feel to play a role in the success of a mission?

2. Does your spouse's level of interest and excitement for your vocation play any part in feeling supported, especially when your job takes you away from home?

3. What aspects of your spouse's talents or vocation do you most respect or admire?

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

Life can feel very serious sometimes, and couples forget to have fun and be playful. Schedule a game night with your spouse. Choose a game with some physicality to it like Twister, Pictionary, or Charades. Although you may initially feel awkward, being silly and taking life and each other less seriously will remind you to have fun with each other.



“I imagined what it would be like to grow so accustomed to this all-professional, all-adult environment and then return to home life, children, and civilians.”
—p. 135

★ TRANSFORMED ★ It's All About Perspective: Managing the homefront, a move, and the kids while Corie travels, Matt writes: "It is hard to help these little ones understand that Daddy needs a moment when he is not thinking about their every need, all the while worrying about the safety and security of his own anchor who is far away." —p. 144

For the Military Spouse:

1. How do you prefer to spend leisure time with your spouse, during vacation, reintegration, or when your spouse is on leave? Do you and your spouse experience conflict over planning leisure time?

2. What is your reaction to Matt's role-reversal comments on pages 143 and 144? Did his words validate any of your own experiences?

3. What positive transformation has military life created in your marriage?

For the Service Member:

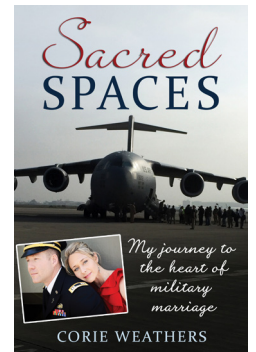
1. Deployment time is often very structured. Does this affect how you choose to spend your off-duty time? Does planning leisure time create conflict with your spouse?

2. What is your reaction to Matt's role-reversal comments on pages 143 and 144?

3. Use positive words to describe how difficult times can be transformative, in deployment and other parts of life.

For Both Spouses:

1. Talk about how each of you would ideally like to spend your leisure time together. What is most important to you about that time?



"I will be okay when he focuses on the mission in front of him. I won't take it personally when some part of him longs for it. I know he would choose family every time if he had to, but I don't need to make it a win or lose or a choice he is forced to make."
—p. 148

2. Do you experience conflict over leisure time? Why or why not? If you do, what are some ways you can meet both of your desires?

3. Share an example of a time in your life when difficulty brought positive change.

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

Sexual intimacy is probably the most multi-sensory shared sacred space we can participate in with our spouse. Create a special evening where you plan ahead by setting up the space visually with candles, incorporating a pleasing fragrance, and concentrating on pleasurable touch through massages. Try to engage all your senses as a way of serving your spouse. Create a memorable time together.

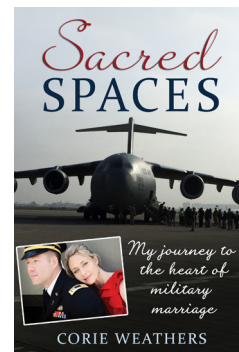
★ **MOVING FORWARD** ★ Take the First Step: The challenge is the same for all of us: We can each choose to take the first step toward a husband or wife. We can give up the preconditions we've placed on each other and make changes in our own hearts first. If we are willing to be vulnerable, we can work to close the gaps between us, rather than let them be filled with fear or resentment.

For Both Spouses:

1. What is the connection between vulnerability and intentionality in your marriage? Define those two terms for a clearer understanding. If you are focused on protecting yourself, are you likely to take the risky first step to close the gaps in your marriage?

2. What first step could you take toward strengthening your relationship? How could you be more intentional in pursuing a better understanding of your spouse and pursuing a stronger relationship?

3. Do you have a supportive community to help address your sacred spaces? If so, how can you leverage that power to heal your heart and strengthen your marriage? If not, how can you find a support system or strengthen the community you already have?



“...[I]t is so easy to shut down and protect the heart rather than open up so we can better connect and support each other through painful times. No one... can speak peace into a struggling soul better than a spouse. Instead of creating those moments of peace, many of us live with our hearts guarded.”
—p. 153

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

Serve your spouse by doing something you know will say “I love you.” Perhaps it is something your spouse has asked for in the past, like coming home to a clean kitchen, or planning a weekend getaway. Surprise your spouse by doing something that is intentionally planned and done just for him or her.

★ SPIRITUAL REFLECTION ★ God’s Design for Difficult Times: God never promised that following him would mean an easier life or a perfect marriage. Just the opposite. Marriage is a relationship that sometimes reveals our greatest weaknesses, reminding us we need God’s grace and forgiveness daily.

For Both Spouses:

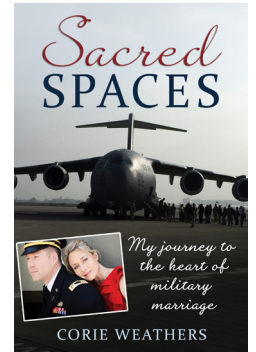
1. Read Genesis 2:15 and 3:1-24. What did Adam and Eve choose instead of trusting God’s design for their relationship? What did they hope to gain? What did they get instead?

2. What unexpected challenges or difficulties have you faced in life, individually and as a couple? How have you handled these challenges, together and apart?

3. Seeking to understand what is in your spouse’s heart will require you to set aside resentment and love more fully. What, if any, are your reservations about taking intentional steps toward a closer relationship?

4. What part does selfishness play in harboring bitterness and resentment? What are the benefits of choosing love over resentment?

5. Conflict in marriage is created when we expect a standard of perfection from our spouse that is not humanly possible, for either of us. Have you seen your own imperfections more fully during this journey? How does this insight impact your ability to give grace to your spouse?



“It is in difficulty that we actually learn *how* to love each other. In this sweet spot, marriage becomes something powerful.”
—p. 162

6. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. What does Paul indicate was the purpose of his thorn?

7. Do you find it hard to forgive yourself, forgive others, forgive your spouse? Why or why not?

8. Refer to the challenges you discussed in Question 2. How did these difficult experiences or conflicts make you stronger, as individuals and as a couple?

Create a Shared Sacred Space:

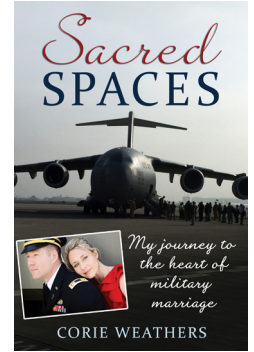
Praying together is a multi-sensory and vulnerable experience. Research shows it also calms anxiety. Hearing the deepest needs and gratitude of your spouse is revealing. Commit to praying together every day for the next week. Don't stress about the length of your prayer or how fancy it sounds. Simply spend that valuable time together, and then talk about how it makes a difference.



“I made my peace with my role as a military spouse. I made my peace with Afghanistan, too. As we flew over the mountains, this time in the darkness, I forgave them for what they had taken. I made a point to leave my resentment there the way Matt and so many others had left their innocence. I picked up something, too. I resolved to take back lost ground in my marriage, and to love with a new heart.” —p. 126

You have spent this time reading and discussing the book *Sacred Spaces* and reflecting on the sacred spaces in your own marriage. How will you take your experience into your everyday life with your spouse?

What will you do to become more intentional in your marriage today?



“I left behind my entitlement and pursued him to the other side of the world, just so I could understand him more. What I found was that I didn't have to go that far. The simple fact that I wasn't content with the space between us was enough to draw us closer.”
—p. 151

