



Working Through Relationship Winters

In chapter four of *A Wife's Secret to Happiness*, I share about a rough few months in my marriage. Our painful “relationship winter,” when I learned what it felt like to sit in a room with the man you love and feel completely alone.

Here's the thing, I know many of you have faced colder winters than I. Sometimes with frost and ice built thick through years of heartache. I don't even pretend to know your unique pain or the difficulties you've experienced. I only come to share insight from what I've learned and how I've seen God prove faithful on my behalf.


Jared and I blundered our way through these isolating months, but in hindsight, these are seven of the best choices we made when working through our relationship winter.

- 1. We trusted God with each other individually and with our relationship.**
- 2. We made it about getting to Jesus.**
- 3. We worked on communicating.**
- 4. We determined to stay committed.**
- 5. We kept trying, and kept changing our approach.**
- 6. We weren't afraid to acknowledge the issues.**
- 7. We made time for fun.**

- 1. We trusted God with each other individually and with our relationship.**

Jared: When I think back to this season in our marriage, it was a time of hurt, confusion, and a lot of unknowns. The whole circumstance was unfamiliar. Even in times of raw emotion I could express to God where I was at and not feel like I had to hold back. The vulnerability I expressed in my times alone with Jesus allowed me to move past the hurt and connect on a genuine level. I trusted God with the reality of where I was. I found freedom in Jesus's comfort and often received clarity that I didn't have before.

Jen: This season came during our first few months of having a baby, so everything felt new, unknown, and difficult. Even finding time to sleep—which was never a problem



before—became an epic undertaking. As silly as it sounds, I had a hard time understanding what I wanted. Did I want to stay home? Did I want a nanny? If I wanted daycare, for how long, and where? The uncertainty increased my discomfort, so I held on to what I was certain of. God had good plans for my family. He would see us through this.

2. We made it about getting to Jesus.

Jared: For me, this was about seeking what God wanted for our lives rather than what I wanted. I sought to understand what he was trying to teach us and fought the draw to search for the immediate and quickest answer. I had to choose to trust God to lead our conversation and guide our plans instead of solving the problem on my own.

Jen: I want Jared on my team, to be on my page and adjust to my perspective. And that's usually because I'm right, or at least I think I am. For me, making it about getting into Jesus's presence means I have to change my focus. I want to hear what HE has to say. I want to adjust to God's perspective, and usually that has little to do with winning the argument and is more about developing my character in the middle of it.

3. We worked on communicating.

Jared: We both worked hard to communicate how we felt without massive explosions of emotions or verbal attacks. We kept coming back to the conversation, and I worked to listen to Jen and really understand where she was coming from, even in times I felt hurt. It took vulnerability to share where I was instead of accuse and assume, and we worked to find common ground—even if it required that we revisit the same unresolved topic again and again.

Jen: As difficult as this season was for me, I knew it had to be difficult for Jared as well. So as much as I wanted him to hear me, listen to me, adjust to what I needed, I worked to offer the same to him. And when I messed up and emotions got too heated, I tried to admit it as quickly as possible so I could apologize and we could move on. Sometimes it was as simple as, "I'm super emotional right now and I'm working on it." That admission helped us from turning a little outburst into a bigger issue.



4. We determined to stay committed.

Jared: The hardship of this season and the hurt feelings didn't outweigh my love for Jen. I didn't allow it to cause me to question the love she had for me, or whether we should be together. I saw the situation as what it was—an external event, a hard time that impacted both of us, and that we could get through together.

Jen: It was never a question of if we were going to work through this—only a matter of how and when. I hold myself to that rule because my natural tendency is to rain grenades of harsh words on top of his head when I'm upset, and day by day, that chips away at our level of commitment.


5. We kept trying, and kept changing our approach.

Jared: This one really is what it says. We kept trying. We didn't give up when the first solution failed, or when it turned out we weren't on the same page. When something didn't work, we tried something else. It wasn't fun and required perseverance, but in the end, we found a good solution for our family.

Jen: For months, I felt like Jared didn't understand. He'd listen to the words coming out of my mouth, but he didn't really hear me. So I kept trying. I'd find a different way to describe what I felt, or use a fresh example to show him what tendencies hurt my feelings. I ditched the words that sounded perfect to me and tried to find words that would help him relate to what I was going through. Eventually, we found a way to get on the same page again.

6. We weren't afraid to acknowledge the issues.

Jared: I may not know why something is bothering me, but when Jen calls me on it, it helps me work through what I'm feeling and why. If I withhold my thoughts or feelings on an issue, usually that means the problem grows to color my perspective on the day. It changes my lens so I see everything through the perspective of anger or frustration. Knowing this about myself, I work to verbalize and work through issues quickly so we can move on. And often, just talking about the issue relieves the burden.



Jen: *I'm not a beat-around-the-bush type person, so this one came easy for me. I like getting everything out in the open. This also meant being OK acknowledging and talking through issues Jared had with me, including my faults and mistakes. It wasn't always easy, but I didn't want to let my pride get in the way of reconciliation.*

7. We made time for fun.

Jared: *When you're frustrated or dissatisfied, it can be easier to escape to do something fun with a friend, and exclude the person you're struggling with. In this relationship winter, we found ways to hit pause on the hard conversations and still enjoy time together. Sometimes a short date night or small window where we could laugh and talk about something less serious helped relieve the pressure and stress of the other circumstances we couldn't yet solve.*

Jen: *I needed those date nights. I struggled with the balance of work and home, housework, mom life, and figuring out what my baby wanted and needed. Evenings away from the home, with our kid peacefully in the arms of a trusted sitter, gave me time to learn how to be me again, and to remember the fun in my marriage.*

Special Note: An honorable mention is the opportunity to seek counsel. While that wasn't something we sought out at a professional level, we happily would have if we couldn't find a resolution on our own. Jared and I did have one-on-one conversations with trusted friends to get advice, feedback, and pro-marriage encouragement. We found these conversations invaluable. Your relationship winter may benefit from more intensive or specialized help. In as much as it depends on you, find the help your relationship needs to give it the care it deserves.

If you're facing a rough patch in your relationship, I hope our experience encourages and strengthens you for the road ahead. God wants to bring you through to the spring.

OK, so I said this is a worksheet so now it's your turn. How can you apply each of these elements to your life and relationship right now? Don't try and figure everything out in the next day or week. Take baby steps and trust that Jesus will not only meet you in the middle of it, he will lead you through.



1. We can demonstrate that we trust God with each other individually and with our relationship by:

--

2. We can focus on getting to Jesus through:

--

3. We can work on communicating by:

--

4. We are determined to stay committed and can show this in:

--



5. We will keep trying and keep changing our approach. One way to apply this today is:

--

6. We won't be afraid to acknowledge the issues. Issues like:

--

7. We can make time for fun. For example:

--