Beneath the Anger, Under the Silence

SURFACE FEELINGS AND DEEPER ONES

> *Anger is the bodyguard.*
> *Grief and fear are the ones it's guarding.*

Feelings come in layers. On the surface are the fast, loud reactions everyone can see: anger, irritation, cold defensiveness, the eye-roll, the slammed cabinet. Those feelings are real, but they are rarely the whole story. They are the armor the softer feelings wear when a fight starts.

Underneath, almost always, are the tender ones. Fear of not mattering. Sadness about the distance. Shame about feeling like a failure. Loneliness, which has no dignity in the middle of an argument. These deeper feelings are the real message. They rarely get spoken, because showing them feels dangerous right when a fight makes danger feel close.

That is the trap. Surface feelings push a partner away. The deeper feelings, if they could be seen, would pull a partner closer. Nobody softens for a prosecutor. Almost everyone softens for “I was scared I'd lost you.” Learning to find the layer underneath and say it out loud is the most useful skill in this whole series. It turns armor into an open door.

GO ONE LAYER DOWN

1. After your next flare-up, once you're calm, each of you name your surface feeling: anger, coldness, defensiveness.
2. Then ask yourself, “And under that, if I'm honest, I felt...” and wait for the softer word.
3. Common ones: afraid, unimportant, ashamed, alone, helpless, sad.
4. Share just the deeper word: “Under my anger was ___.”
5. The listener's only job is to take it in gently. No rebuttal, no fixing. Just “thank you for telling me.”

WHEN IT’S HARD

If you look under the anger and only find more anger, check your body instead. The sinking stomach, the tight throat, the heat behind the eyes. The body usually knows the softer feeling before you have words for it.

TO SIT WITH

Which soft feeling is hardest for you to say out loud? Who taught you it wasn't safe?

When your partner is angriest, what tender thing might the bodyguard be protecting?

OUR INTENTION THIS WEEK

Something small you can both actually do this week.

WITH YOU ON THE JOURNEY,

Dr. Mark Gregory Karris