The Chasm Isn't What You Think

WHAT THE FIGHTS ARE REALLY ABOUT

> *Most fights aren't about the dishes.*
> *They're a knock on a door that feels locked.*

When couples drift apart they usually blame the obvious things: communication, compatibility, stress, personality. But under almost every repeating fight and every cold silence there is one question that is hard to live with: Are you there for me? Do I matter to you? If I call, will you come?

When the answer feels uncertain, the body sounds an alarm, and people in alarm do desperate things. Some pound on the door. They criticize, demand, and escalate. Anything to get a response. Others protect themselves from the alarm. They shut down, go quiet, disappear into work or a screen. Both are protests against the same fear: losing the connection.

Seeing it this way changes a lot. Your angry partner is not a tyrant. They are panicking at a door that looks closed. Your silent partner is not indifferent. They are overwhelmed and hiding from the feeling of failing you. The distance between you was not dug by meanness. Two frightened people dug it while protecting themselves, and the same two people can close it, once they stop fighting each other and start answering the question.

LOOK UNDER ONE FIGHT

1. Pick a recent fight. A small or medium one, not your worst.
2. Set the topic aside and ask yourself: what was I really asking for?
3. Try saying it: “Somewhere in that fight, I think I was asking whether I matter to you.”
4. Let your partner answer that question, the real one, directly.
5. Notice how different the fight looks with the real question on the table.

WHEN IT’S HARD

If it sounds absurd that a fight about laundry could really be about whether you matter, check the size of the feelings. Nobody's heart pounds over towels. Big feelings point to a big question.

TO SIT WITH

What is your version of pounding on the door? What is your version of hiding from it?

If your partner could hear the question under your complaints, what would it be?

OUR INTENTION THIS WEEK

Something small you can both actually do this week.

WITH YOU ON THE JOURNEY,

Dr. Mark Gregory Karris