



THE
*Unveiled
Wife*

Embracing intimacy with God and your husband

JENNIFER SMITH

FOREWORD BY DR. JULI SLATTERY

Jennifer is one of those rare authors who will take you on a journey to wholeness in your life by writing with authenticity and transparency about her own. She is not afraid to reveal her flaws and faults so that the life of every person lucky enough to read her words can be transformed.

FAWN WEAVER

New York Times and *USA Today* bestselling author

Jennifer has written a relevant, honest, sympathetic, and enlightening book that will deeply touch those secret places inside that seek understanding and truth in the mysterious relationship of marriage. Even more, her vulnerability will give you hope as you journey toward intimacy in your relationship with your husband. I highly recommend this book to young marrieds and to anyone who longs for a stronger marriage.

SALLY CLARKSON

Author of *Own Your Life*

The Unveiled Wife isn't your typical how-to book for wives. It is an invitation to be completely honest with your personal marriage struggles, encouraging you to move beyond them while seeing God's story through them. You will be drawn into Jennifer's story of trials turned redemption and find yourself longing for that in your own life!

RUTH SCHWENK

Speaker, author, and creator of TheBetterMom.com

Jennifer Smith has woven a story of unconditional love with threads of unfathomable grace in the pages of *The Unveiled Wife*. With honesty and vulnerability, she shares her journey of finding true intimacy with both her husband and her Creator. As you encounter her story, you will see your own. You are a woman who is wanted, wooed, and wowed by the ultimate Lover of your soul—Jesus.

KAREN EHMANN

Proverbs 31 Ministries speaker and author of seven books, including *Keep It Shut*

Jennifer Smith bravely shares her wisdom won in the trenches and on the front lines of love and marriage. With raw honesty and transparency, *The Unveiled Wife* pulls back the curtains and shows the struggles and obstacles in real love, sex, and marriage. This book brings hope to the hopeless and light to places of brokenness and despair. If you are looking for the authentic answers to questions for which you may have thought no one had answers, try reading the pages of honesty in *The Unveiled Wife*.

PAM FARREL

Author of forty books, including the bestselling *Men Are Like Waffles—Women Are Like Spaghetti*

As the bride's veil is lifted, her face glows, fully exposed in all her beauty as she awaits her groom to lean in and seal his love with a kiss. The intimacy found in this moment is often lost over time, as the difficulties of marriage cause us to cover up who we really are. Jennifer Smith's book *The Unveiled Wife* will inspire you to live an unveiled life of freedom found in being fully known and loved by God in order to fully know and love your husband.

TRISHA DAVIS

Author of *Beyond Ordinary* and founder of RefineUs.org

Jennifer Smith takes transparency to a sacred level in *The Unveiled Wife*. Her honesty about her unspoken expectations that led to disappointment and her own unconfessed sin that led to near disaster in her life and marriage is without a doubt courageous and admirable. Her journey of humility and surrender, which led to transformation in her life and marriage, will inspire and challenge women to seek a better place in their own lives and marriages.

CRAIG GROSS

Founder of XXXchurch.com and author of Bestsexlifeforwomen.com online video course

Authentic! Honest! Revealing! Surprising! *The Unveiled Wife* is all this and more. If you want to move toward deep intimacy with God *and* with your husband, I highly recommend this amazing book to you! It could change you and your marriage.

LINDA DILLOW

Author of *What's It Like to Be Married to Me?* and co-author of *Passion Pursuit*

With refreshing and fierce honesty, Jennifer takes us behind the veil of some of the most challenging and intimate marriage issues. Whether you are married or single, read this book! *The Unveiled Wife* is the tool women need to help ignite true passion, heal deep hurts, and cultivate thriving marriages that are more beautiful than their weddings.

LARA CASEY

Editor-in-chief of *Southern Weddings* and author of *Make It Happen*

In *The Unveiled Wife*, Jennifer holds nothing back as she humbly unveils her insecurities, struggles, doubts, and fears as a wife and in her marriage. She then captivately shows how the Lord transformed her heart. Whether you are married, engaged, or simply planning to marry one day, *The Unveiled Wife* is a must-read that will equip you in your marriage. God's grace and love are evident throughout the pages.

KYLIE BISUTTI

Author of *I'm No Angel*

Jen has the most beautiful and articulate way of opening up her heart and highlighting the redemptive, healing power of Jesus. Her story is intimate and vulnerable; her struggles typify a reality we've all experienced. She's the long-lost sister in Christ who is praying for you, walking with you, and constantly cheering you on in your marriage.

SELENA FREDERICK

Co-creator and writer at FierceMarriage.com

This book not only offers incredible healing for marriages, but it was healing for me as a woman. Jen guides you through the beauty of being vulnerable and transparent with others as well as with your husband. The meaning and value of truly being unveiled and raw with yourself, your husband, and the world is so restorative and leads to such unfathomable intimacy with God. After reading *The Unveiled Wife*, I felt freedom, confidence, and massive amounts of love for me and my husband. I hope every woman and wife can experience the magnificent transformation that comes from being unveiled.

KRISTEN DALTON WOLFE

Miss USA 2009, founder of SheisMore.com, and author of *Rise Up, Princess: 60 Days to Revealing Your Royal Identity*

Jennifer Smith is so authentic and humble as she pulls back the curtain on the first few years of her marriage. For wives who need hope that sex *can* get better, Jennifer points to practical answers to physical problems, but she also shows how our spiritual attitudes are the key to true joy and oneness with our husbands!

SHEILA WRAY GREGOIRE

Blogger at ToLoveHonorandVacuum.com

Hope for today . . . that's what so many women need and what everyone will find as Jennifer takes readers on a journey to a place where so many thought they would never arrive—openness and true intimacy.

LISA JACOBSON

Author of *100 Ways to Love Your Husband* and blogger at Club31Women.com

Lives are radically changed when we surrender our hearts to God's will. *The Unveiled Wife* testifies to that with a beautiful picture of the masterpiece a marriage can be.

DARLENE SCHACHT

Author of *Messy Beautiful Love*

THE Unveiled Wife

Embracing Intimacy with God and Your Husband



JENNIFER SMITH



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Contents



Foreword.....	xi
Introduction.....	xiii
1. I Guess This Is the End	1
2. Scar Tissue	5
3. Is He the One?	11
4. “Officially” Dating.....	19
5. Hiding My Sin	25
6. Engaged	29
7. The Wedding	35
8. Trouble in Paradise.....	41
9. It’s My Fault	49
10. Change of Scenery	53
11. A Trip to Africa	61
12. Embittered by Jealousy.....	69
13. Is Marriage a Mistake?.....	75
14. I’m Broken	81
15. Puffed Up	85
16. Escape Artists	91
17. Dark Days.....	101
18. The Blame Game	107
19. Fantasyland	113
20. Making Peace with My Past.....	121
21. Depriving My Husband	131
22. Inception.....	137
23. Transparency.....	143
24. Standing for Marriage	151

25.	The Getaway.....	157
26.	Unconditional Love.....	163
27.	Our Miracle	169
28.	Unveiled.....	177
29.	Confronting the Heart Issues	181
30.	God's Masterpiece	195

APPENDIX A:

A True Love Story	203
-------------------------	-----

APPENDIX B:

A Word about Sex and True Intimacy....	211
--	-----

APPENDIX C:

How the Environment May Affect You...	219
---------------------------------------	-----

APPENDIX D:

The <i>Unveiled Wife</i> Blog.....	225
------------------------------------	-----

Acknowledgments	234
-----------------------	-----

Notes	236
-------------	-----

About the Author.....	237
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Foreword

I meet many women facing a crossroads in marriage. Often they don't know where to turn for help. They have read the books, commiserated with friends, and maybe even reached out to a counselor, only to continue to struggle with disappointment. Often these women have lost all hope that things will ever change. After failed attempts at problem solving, many simply choose to give up.

“My husband and I are incompatible. We made a mistake and never should have gotten married.”

“He's a wonderful man, but I just don't love him anymore.”

“If only I'd known this about him, I never would have married him.”

The world is happy to proclaim such women and their husbands mismatched. Devoid of hope, these women begin to consider their options: a lifetime sentence in a lifeless marriage or divorce.

Jennifer Smith and her husband, Aaron, could easily have become one more Christian couple who love the Lord but just couldn't make their marriage work. Instead, they found hope at the crossroads of despair. Without a shred of confidence that they could “fix” their marriage, they threw themselves on the mercy of God, reaffirming a commitment of “till death do us part.” Theirs is a love story worthy of Nicholas Sparks, and it happens to be true.

While the specific details of your marriage may differ from Jennifer's, the struggles are likely similar—fading hope for a love

that seems irrevocably damaged by sin, selfish choices, and the brokenness of our world. Unfortunately, many wives are giving up on difficult marriages or escaping into fantasy with books like *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Jennifer shares with you how she was tempted to do both. However, the unconditional love of her Savior and her husband invited her to pursue honesty and healing.

Even if they come from strong, Christian backgrounds, almost every couple will face challenges in their intimate relationship. After hearing so many stories from hurting women, I felt the Lord asking me to take a step of faith. In 2012, I left my role as the cohost of the Focus on the Family broadcast to help launch a women's ministry called Authentic Intimacy. My cofounder, Linda Dillow, and I proclaim God's truth about spiritual, emotional, and sexual intimacy. Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined saying yes to this assignment, especially as the mom of three adolescent boys! Yet God gave me a glimpse of the incredible pain that surrounds the area of intimacy.

That is why I found Jennifer's story so compelling. She holds nothing back, sharing courageously about her insecurities, sexual difficulties, sinfulness, and despair. Her vulnerability is like a mirror, asking each of us to be equally as honest about how we are responding to setbacks and unmet longings within our own marriages.

Every great story involves obstacles that seem impossible to overcome. So does yours. The simple truth expressed through this book is this: "Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear" (Isaiah 59:1, NIV).

In my job ministering to women, I regularly see and hear how God does the impossible in our lives when we fully surrender to Him. There is no brokenness that is beyond His healing and no pain beyond His redemption.

May your love story be like Jennifer's, one in which the Lord brings beauty out of ashes!

Dr. Juli Slattery
Psychologist and president of Authentic Intimacy

Introduction



The ebb and flow of life makes for an interesting journey, one that has been full of sorrow and joy, with everything in between, for my husband and me. Most days it all happens simultaneously. The first few years of our marriage were devastating, and my heart broke over the mess we were living in. Marriage was not meeting my needs as I thought it would when I yearned to be a wife. My husband quickly became a source of disappointment, often failing to fulfill me as I thought he should. I harbored a growing anger toward God for not giving me the marriage I had always dreamed of, believing I was entitled to a perfect life because I did all the “right” things for Him.

The greatest trial that overshadowed my husband and me in our first four years of marriage was a sexual problem. In addition to that struggle, the friction of learning how to be one with each other brought other challenges to the surface. I desperately wanted to blame anyone else—mostly my husband—for the problems we faced, in denial that I could be a contributing factor. I was disturbed to find out that *I* fell below par, an image of myself I refused to accept for a long time.

Because we struggled during times of sexual intimacy, I felt inadequate as a woman, as if I were in some way broken. Humiliated,

I doubted God's purpose for my marriage, and I isolated myself from God and from my husband.

In those trying times of conflict and contention, apathy and agony over the desire to separate from my husband, I met God, or perhaps I should say He met me. I thought I had always known Him, yet I struggled in my faith, avoiding Him in anger and feeling miserably stuck in my relationship with Him. Regardless of my rebellion and apparent dissatisfaction, God met me where I was. He taught me who He is, while revealing the intricate details of His design for marriage. In my suffering, God pursued me and carried me to a safe place, an intimate place with Him. As I drew closer to God and allowed Him to show me things about myself that needed attention and change, I learned a few important things about marriage, one of which came through an inspiring message from pastor and author Paul Washer.

How would you ever learn unconditional love if you were married to someone who met all the conditions? . . . How would you ever learn mercy, patience, long-suffering, or heartfelt compassion if you were married to someone who never failed you? Who was never difficult with you? Who never sinned against you? Who was never slow to acknowledge their sin or ask for forgiveness? How would you ever learn grace to pour out your favor on someone who did not deserve it if you were married to someone who was always deserving of all good things?

The main purpose of marriage is that through your marriage you become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. . . . You are married to a person who does not meet all the conditions so that you might learn unconditional love. You are married to a person who needs mercy so that you learn to give it. You are married to a person who does not deserve so that you learn to lavishly pour yourself out on a person who does not

respond appropriately. And thus you become like the God you worship!¹

My perspective on marriage changed dramatically after receiving these astounding words. God was teaching me how He could use my experiences in marriage to change me and make me more like Him. He could do the same for my husband. That realization struck me to the core. Marriage serves a greater purpose than I was ever taught growing up. Knowing this gave me hope and faith in my future together with my husband, reconciling and redeeming the love I thought was lost. Only the Lord could overhaul such a broken couple and completely transform us.

Over the last several years, as God continues to transform me and my marriage, I have also learned the value of what it means to be unveiled: to embrace those moments of raw vulnerability in order to draw closer to others in a real way. I have gained a rich understanding of how intimacy is cultivated in relationships by allowing myself to be made known. God gave me the courage to be transparent with Him and with my husband, revealing more about me—my true identity, my heart's desires, and my personal struggles.

God then used the pain from my marriage to birth in me a passion to encourage others in the midst of their hardships. With encouragement from my husband, I created the *Unveiled Wife* blog to share what I was learning about marriage in hopes of inspiring other wives to stand together and affirm one another, and to provide resources to help those in need. As I began blogging, I quickly realized it was as if I had reached up and turned a light on, only to discover that I was not the only one standing there. Where darkness had once overshadowed many of us, the radiant light of Christ exposed the truth that none one of us is truly ever alone.

The message of the unveiled wife is based on 2 Corinthians 3:16-18:

Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (NIV)

When anyone turns toward God, the veil is taken away—freedom to be authentic comes and transformation takes place. This is a powerful message that can radically affect marriages for the better. Since advocating for transparency that leads to intimacy in marriage and being open about my own marital issues, one of the greatest responses I have received about UnveiledWife.com is from women saying, “I am not alone.”

Simply put, that is why I have written this book. I am a wife who has endured hardship in marriage and can testify to how God turned my mourning into rejoicing.

Shortly after creating *Unveiled Wife*, I felt a divine urge to write my marriage story, specifically recounting the struggle we faced in the bedroom. I was hesitant at first, terrified of exposing my vulnerability. It was also too painful to revisit those uncomfortably difficult times when my marriage almost crumbled. Yet no matter how hard I tried to push from my heart the thought of writing this book, God consistently brought it back to the surface of my heart with a gentle nudge, encouraging me not to be dismayed. He affirmed that my obedience in detailing what He taught me would provide hope and help to other wives. And when I realized that this book could influence women in a real way, I felt responsible, as if I *had* to write it.

Penned throughout these pages are moments from my marriage, events God has used to refine me as a woman and as a wife. I caution you that the majority of the content is regarding sex because that has been our greatest marital struggle by far. (My husband gave me permission to share intimate details about our relationship, and I have had his full support from the beginning.)

As you read my story, you may not be able to understand some of our struggles. (I'm still bewildered with this issue myself.) Or you may read my story and feel astonished that someone else understands the pain you've felt because maybe our experiences are identical. Whether you grasp the weight of our specific issues or can't relate at all, I want you to know my motivation for sharing my story is to help the countless wives who suffer in silence as I did. While your struggles may be different from mine, they may be just as painful. And though sex is a serious issue that I feel compelled to address, I also share the transformation God worked in me and the lessons I learned that have the potential to heal wives and their marriages. I also want to drag several other serious issues into the light—things I know with certainty many women also battle with daily.

I hope my story diminishes the lies that we listen to about being alone in our struggles. Specifically, I hope it unveils the truth about the unmet expectations, imperfections, and insecurities in your own heart as you seek to better your relationship with God and with your spouse.

I admit this book is not intended to be a one-size-fits-all resource, and I am not an expert with a proven method of success to share with you. I am just a wife willing to share my messy life and what God has been teaching me through it. My greatest hope is that you will be empowered and transformed, no matter what season you find yourself in, to live in the freedom of Jesus Christ.

Transformation is an incredible process of positive change. For me, it's a journey of triumph that reflects the awesome power and glory of the gospel. It is the difference between who I was and the God-fearing woman I am becoming. This book is not the sum of my transformation; rather it is just the beginning: the story of a wife saved by God's grace and the extraordinary experience of learning what it means to be unveiled. I'm confident God will use *The Unveiled Wife* to continually speak into your life and encourage you in your walk with God and your marriage.

Dear Lord,

Thank You for the beautiful covenant of marriage, the mystery of the gospel, and the incredible way marriage—which You have ingeniously designed so that we may better understand and experience true intimacy—reflects the love story of Christ. May the woman reading this book feel You near and know she is not alone. May You stir a desire in her heart to know You more deeply and give her the courage to allow herself to be known. May Your Holy Spirit anoint her as she reads this book and bless her with profound wisdom and transcending peace as You shape her into Your glorious image. In Jesus' name, amen!

CHAPTER 1

I Guess This Is the End



Sitting in our car's passenger seat, I pulled out my phone to check Facebook. No immediate or pending actions that required my attention, yet scrolling through status after status distracted me from reality. My husband, Aaron, and I made our way through the church parking lot, weaving in and out of congestion, searching for a parking spot. As soon as Aaron turned off the engine, we got out of the car and walked to the sanctuary, synchronized in motion. The morning air was cold, mirroring our emotion. We continued on autopilot, finding our seats just before the service began. Though he sat next to me, emotional isolation left me feeling alone. We didn't say much to each other; the weight of despair strangled my thoughts, my feelings, and apparently my speech. I felt as if I were wearing a neon sign that flashed "out of order," but no one seemed to notice.

I was dying inside, sick with regret over the way my marriage of almost four years was turning out. My breathing was shallow, a side effect of the anxiety that relentlessly pummeled my fragile spirit.

Is this it, God? I wondered. Is this really it?

My husband had been silent all morning. His eyes reflected pain and defeat. Bent forward with his elbows resting on his knees, it looked as if he were wasting away faster than I was.

Why is this happening to us?

I'd never seen my husband so disheartened, and I was clueless about how to respond to him. I wanted to comfort him and say, "Everything is going to be okay," but I felt like I would be lying. We were miles from hope, lost in a world we were not prepared for.

The grief welled up in tears that sat on the rims of my eyes. My husband's head hung low for most of the sermon. As the pastor spoke, I was distracted by negative thoughts. I was angry with God for letting us endure so much hardship, bombarded with familiar and convincing thoughts that I deserved better. I thought following God and being a good Christian guaranteed blessing. I didn't understand that all marriages encounter hardship. So when my marriage didn't meet my expectations, I questioned if I was "good" enough. Doubt stirred in my heart, making me feel inadequate as a Christian and as a wife.

I'm not cut out for this, I thought. As thought after negative thought continued, I turned my frustration toward my husband.

Pretend everything is fine! I can't stand seeing you like this . . . seeing us like this.

I was convinced we would be discussing divorce over lunch.

I wondered how many other people sitting in church that day felt as if they were being buried alive—trapped beneath the weight of a growing pile of dirt. I was ready to make any kind of sacrifice just to survive, yet I wanted to die to escape the pain. I was completely worn out.

When we married, we were adamant that we would face life as a team, committed never to opting out through the "D" word. But already the battle was wearing us down. Unwanted circumstances aroused an unwanted desire for divorce. Contemplating the end of our relationship became an emphatic reality I could not ignore.

Seeing my husband slumped over in church, rotting in despair, made me cringe. In that moment I realized how my actions over the years had taken a toll on his life. I'd been so busy dwelling on

my pain that I'd failed to consider how our marital issues were affecting my husband, how *I* was affecting my husband.

That morning as I sat in the church service, I knew this had to be the end of my selfish ways—it had to be or my marriage would die. God finally had my full attention. I knew that only He would have the power to transform me as a wife and heal my broken marriage.

I was humbled, and all I could do was surrender the wreck I'd helped cause. I looked at my husband and prayed, “Lord, please save us. I don't want to divorce this man. Lord, please help us!”

»————— *Behind the Veil* —————»

1. Unmet expectations became a catalyst for the bitterness growing in my heart toward my husband. I believed he should live up to the standard I held of him in my mind, and when he failed me in any area, discontentment over my *whole* marriage tainted my attitude. In what ways do your unmet expectations affect your attitude toward your husband? Toward God?
2. I thought that as a Christian I had to be perfect so that I wouldn't misrepresent God's gospel to others. Stepping into church and seeing how other people were seemingly so perfect only confirmed my conviction. I didn't want to be the Christian having marital problems, so I pretended my life was great. In reality, smiling on the outside while suffering on the inside never benefits His gospel; it only corrodes my soul. Have you suffered silently in church? If so, what motivated you to hide your pain from others?
3. With all my attention focused on my needs and what would fulfill me, I neglected to consider my husband's needs. I knew what was happening to me, but I figured my husband

could never understand how deeply wounded I felt. In my hurt, I justified that my pain was more important than his. What are some reasons you might consider your pain or frustrations about marriage to be more important than your husband's?

4. "Unwanted circumstances aroused an unwanted desire for divorce." Have you ever contemplated divorce? If so, what unwanted circumstances motivated you to consider the end of your marriage?