

¹⁹Husband, read the
bitter toward
²⁰Children, you have
for this fill it."
²¹Father—Paul,
they love you.
²²

ters
se
b

MARITAL PROBLEMS PROBLEM-SOLVING

TIM CLINTON

(Colossians 3:18, 19)



All marriages go through times when love grows cold or lacks the closeness we desire. And, when our marriages get into trouble, we hurt. Many times we can't even pinpoint what went wrong.

If people are willing to step back and review their marital story, they will usually find a pattern. If left unchecked, that pattern can lead them to heartbreak and, maybe, to divorce.

There is hope for the troubled marriage, however. Since the pattern is often predictable, the courageous can work to stop the harmful patterns and save their marriages. But more than just keeping their marriage afloat, they can work to reverse the process and breathe new life into their marriages.

THE PROCESS AND CYCLE OF DISAFFECTION

How does disaffection start? It actually begins with everyday life—with pressures people face daily. Following are some examples.

Sin/Selfishness

Sin is part of our nature. As Christians, we seek to be victorious, but we will often fail. Somewhere in the marital story, one or both partners may begin to take advantage of the other. They hurt each other. As Paul wrote, "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" (Rom. 7:15). Being honest, seeking forgiveness, and staying deeply invested in one's spouse is the only remedy.

Stress

Some marriages have been battered by stresses of life such as financial pressures,

loss, health problems, or demanding work schedules. Spouses must deal with stress by considering the *demands* in life and their ability to *cope* with those demands. If the demands exceed their ability to cope, the formula spells trouble. Spouses need to take an inventory of what stresses have been tearing at their relationship since they married.

Satanic Assault

Since Adam and Eve, Satan has had the poison arrows of hell aimed at the intimate bond of marriage. He is the great confuser and the ultimate liar. He magnifies people's weaknesses and fears, using them as **wedges in their marriages**. Peter described Satan as "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). And he's out to take a big bite out of people's marriages.

Unrealistic Expectations

The gap between unrealized expectations and reality is filled with disappointment. If people's expectations for marriage are unrealistic, they are setting themselves up for a fall. A few common unrealistic expectations include:

> "Marriage will complete me." Some who grew up in unloving homes or some other painful environment, may expect marriage to reverse all the negatives they're carrying into it.

> "My spouse won't hurt me." As the first expectation sees marriage as the healing agent, this one sees marriage as the ulti-

mate
hurt.
> "L
pily-
Every
bring
> "L
spouse
unite
creas
they
wasn't

These
fough
need
no on
needs
is free
pletely

Ma
who
them
detai
Christ
traits
and de
a lot
Child
Many
what
in our
for us
reinf
instan
them
love
realit
what
scrip
recei
tiona
aband
loss
so the

To Lea
See also

mate safe haven. The first experience of hurt, then, is devastating.

➤ "Life will be easy now." This is the "happily-ever-after" expectation of fairy tales. Every unhappy moment in a marriage then brings disappointment and possibly fear.

➤ "Love will keep us together." Every time spouses hurt one another, intentionally or unintentionally, love is perceived as increasingly less effective until, in the end, they can say that their relationship just wasn't meant to be.

These unrealistic expectations must be fought with realistic biblical ones. People need to understand that no one is perfect, no one person will ever fulfill all their needs. Only God can do that. No marriage is free from discord, and no spouse is completely unselfish.

Marriage brings together two people who have many human frailties, and puts them in such close proximity that every detail and flaw is exposed. Hopefully, in Christ, these are strengthened into godly traits. But, it takes a lot of humility, grace, and deep forgiveness. In other words, it is a lot of work.

Childhood Scripts

Many counselors believe that a majority of what drives us as adults happened to us in our early years. These "scripts" written for us long ago are faithfully followed and reinforced as we hold tightly to them. For instance, some whose parents abandoned them may live as if they expect those they love to abandon them. Such scripts distort reality and drive people to act and react in what could be very destructive ways. These scripts also impact how people give and receive love. Unresolved physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, parental divorce, abandonment, gross failure, or emotional loss need to be dealt with before the Father so they don't infect one's marriage.

Time

Relationships and intimacy takes time. Time to understand, enjoy, and respond to one another—time to satisfy the other's needs and have one's own needs satisfied. But with life being lived on the run as it is today, there is little time—unless couples *make* the time. In order to stay close, couples need to regularly schedule time just to be together.

A REASONABLE RESPONSE TO AN UNREASONABLE SITUATION

A natural response to pain in marriage is to create space between ourselves and our partners. Drifting—with a subtle, even unintentional severing of relational strands—takes place. The healing path begins by seeing and reframing our marital story and then responding (not reacting) to each other as Christ would.

Remember, God gave us our spouses so that He could work through us to make him or her more like Christ.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of marital problems include:

- Genesis 2:24
- Proverbs 5:15-23; 12:4
- Ecclesiastes 9:9
- Matthew 19:4-6
- 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; 13:1-13
- Ephesians 5:22-33
- Hebrews 13:4
- James 4:1-10
- 1 Peter 3:1-9

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on marital problems at Colossians 3:18, 19 on page 1575. See also the personality profile of Isaac and Rebekah on page 42.

God. ¹³For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal^a for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. ¹⁴Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. ¹⁵Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that *is* in his^a house.

odiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. ¹⁷And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

¹⁸This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace *be* with you. Amen.

CLOSING EXHORTATIONS AND BLESSING

¹⁶Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the La-

4:13 ^aNU-Text reads *concern*. **4:15** ^aNU-Text reads *Nympha . . . her house*.

KEY PASSAGE



Marital Problems

THE POWER OF LOVE

(3:18, 19)

Marriages have problems for various reasons. An attitude of love and service, each person toward the other, can go a long way toward solving many of the irritations and difficulties that can arise. Wives are told to submit to their husbands, willingly allowing their husbands the position of leadership over the family. Husbands, in turn, are told to love their wives sacrificially, as Christ loved the church.

A wise and Christ-honoring wife seeks her husband's best—serving, helping, comforting, and supporting him as he assumes the God-given role of head of the household. When a wife treats her husband that way, providing a haven at home, she has done him great good. A wise and Christ-honoring husband seeks his wife's best as a godly and loving leader—serving, helping, comforting, and supporting her as she carries out her role in the home (and perhaps in a workplace as well). Most marital problems find healing in mutual love, submission, and respect.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about marital problems on pages 1576, 1577. See also the personality profile of Isaac and Rebekah on page 42.

SOUL NOTE



Helpful, Not Harmful (3:21) Fathers are told not to discourage their children. Although children are commanded to obey their parents, this does not give parents permission to be cruel or unreasonable in their treatment of their children. Parents who nag, belittle, or deride their children destroy their self-esteem and discourage them. The purpose of parental discipline is to train children. Consistent discipline, administered with love, will help children to grow into responsible adults. **Topic: Fatherhood**

²⁰But Isaac said to his son, "How *is it* that you have found *it* so quickly, my son?"

And he said, "Because the LORD your God brought *it* to me."

²¹Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you *are* really my son Esau or not." ²²So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice *is* Jacob's voice, but the hands *are* the hands of Esau." ²³And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him.

²⁴Then he said, "Are you really my son Esau?"

He said, "I *am*."

²⁵He said, "Bring *it* near to me, and I will eat of my son's game, so that my soul may bless

you." So he brought *it* near to him, and he ate; and he brought *him* wine, and he drank.

²⁶Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near now and kiss me, my son." ²⁷And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him and said:

"Surely, the smell of my son
Is like the smell of a field
Which the LORD has blessed.

²⁸ Therefore may God give you
Of the dew of heaven,

Of the fatness of the earth,
And plenty of grain and wine.

²⁹ Let peoples serve you,
And nations bow down to you.

Be master over
And let your
you.
Cursed be ev
And blessed

ESAU'S LOST HOPE

³⁰Now it happened
ished blessing Jacob
gone out from the
that Esau his bro
ing. ³¹He also
brought it to his f
"Let my father ar
that your soul ma
³²And his father
you?"

So he said, "I
Esau."

³³Then Isaac
said, "Who?
game and brought
you came, and I
deed he shall be

³⁴When Esau
he cried with an
cry, and said to
also, O my father

³⁵But he said.
ceit and has take

³⁶And Esau said

PERSONALITY PROFILE

REBEKAH AND ISAAC: FOR WORSE

(GENESIS 27)



Marital Problems

Isaac and Rebekah had a fairy-tale courtship. They were brought together by God's power and loved each other from their first encounter. But it seems that they failed to work at their relationship with the diligence that true lovers practice, for in the end, we find them invalidating each other instead of loving and honoring each other.

Granted there were some unusual stresses in the early years of their marriage. Rebekah was infertile for a long time. When she did get pregnant, twins were born. The boys (Jacob and Esau) had distinctly differing characters right from birth. Unfortunately, each parent chose a favorite. Isaac favored Esau; Rebekah doted on Jacob. The marriage seems to have grown distant. When such division begins to erupt, secrecy replaces honesty, loyalties divide, manipulation occurs.

Years later, while in a foreign country to escape a famine, Isaac introduced Rebekah as his sister because he was afraid for his own life. His lack of chivalry must have had a chilling effect on his wife.

When the boys were forty years old, Esau married two women without his parents' approval. Rebekah, ever protective of Jacob, decided to conspire with her son against her husband. They devised a plan to gain for Jacob the blessing that belonged to Esau as the oldest.

Wait a minute! Rebekah conspired with her son to lie to her husband? Clearly, over time, the love they had felt for each other had disintegrated into lack of communication and companionship. Rebekah's closest friend was no longer her husband, but her son. Rebekah no longer honored her husband, so Jacob did not honor his father.

Conflicts happen in every marriage, and can be resolved when handled in a healthy, respectful manner. But couples must guard against allowing fissures to develop into uncrossable canyons. Keep open the lines of communication. Times change, circumstances change, people change. But a marriage can grow stronger, not weaker, if both spouses are willing to repair the fissures with the putty of communication and committed love.



Attachment/ Blessing

father would
conveyed to
him with a d
25:29-34), b
comprehend
bitter cry" (C
Although
All children
ment in the

To Learn More: Turn to the article about marital problems on pages 1576, 1577. See also the key passage note at Colossians 3:18, 19 on page 1575.

To Learn Mo
personality p

And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope;
She shall sing there,
As in the days of her youth,
As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt.

- 16 "And it shall be, in that day,"
Says the LORD,
"That you will call Me 'My Husband,'^a
And no longer call Me 'My Master,'^b
- 17 For I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals,
And they shall be remembered by their name no more.
- 18 In that day I will make a covenant for them
With the beasts of the field,
With the birds of the air,
And *with* the creeping things of the ground.
Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth,
To make them lie down safely.
- 19 "I will betroth you to Me forever;
Yes, I will betroth you to Me
In righteousness and justice,
In lovingkindness and mercy;
- 20 I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness,
And you shall know the LORD.
- 21 "It shall come to pass in that day
That I will answer," says the LORD;
"I will answer the heavens,
And they shall answer the earth.
- 22 The earth shall answer
With grain,
With new wine,
And with oil;

- They shall answer Jezreel.^a
- 23 Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth,
And I will have mercy on *her who had* not obtained mercy;^a
Then I will say to *those who were* not My people,^b
'You are My people!'
And they shall say, 'You are my God!' "

ISRAEL WILL RETURN TO GOD

3 Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman *who is* loved by a lover^a and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love *the* raisin cakes of the pagans."^b

²So I bought her for myself for fifteen *shekels* of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. ³And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, *will* I be toward you."

⁴For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or *sacred* pillar, without ephod or teraphim. ⁵Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.

GOD'S CHARGE AGAINST ISRAEL

4 Hear the word of the LORD,
You children of Israel,
For the LORD *brings* a charge against the inhabitants of the land:

2:16 ^aHebrew *Ishi* ^bHebrew *Baali* 2:22 ^aLiterally *God Will Sow* 2:23 ^aHebrew *lo-ruhamah* ^bHebrew *lo-ammi* 3:1 ^aLiterally *friend or husband*

SOUL NOTE



Extraordinary Love (3:1–5) When Gomer was committing adultery, God told Hosea to bring her back and love her. Hosea could have refused; he could have asked the authorities to put Gomer to death instead (Deut. 22:22). Or he simply could have tried to ignore the problem. In obedience to God, however, Hosea went to Gomer and used his own money to buy her back. Reaching out after being rejected, being faithful to the unfaithful, is difficult. Yet that is the kind of love God has shown us (Rom. 3:23–26; 5:1). God reaches out every day, calling us back to Him.

Topic: Marital Problems