

SAVE MY MARRIAGE TODAY!



Consults Book
VOLUME 1

A collection of marriage consultations written
and compiled by Andrew Rusbatch

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Introduction

Saving a marriage is seldom a simple task, as an accurate definition of marriage and what constitutes a problem is varied and complicated. While counselors and self help guides endeavor to provide couples with the answers they need to their most pressing marriage problems, there are a number of situations and influences that make some peoples' marriage crises unique.

This book is a compilation of consultations that have taken place between me and members of the Save My Marriage Today team, and couples in search of answers that they feel our course hasn't fully answered.

The purpose of this book is to facilitate your learning and understanding of the complexity, while at the same time universality, of marriage problems, and what it takes to create a truly secure and loving relationship.

I have edited any identifying details from the submissions and my replies, in order to protect the anonymity of my members. Other than that, I remind you that these are real consultations, from people with real marriage problems.

The consultations are broken down into several broad topics or themes, which will assist you in your navigation through this book and its contents. The book is divided into three volumes, in order that you might be able to read and digest the material, and print them if necessary, with more ease than a single 300+ page book.

As you read through the consultations, you may know someone with a similar marriage problem. Some of the consultations may strike parallels with your own marriage. In imparting our wisdom to members, our hope is to share this information with you, so that you may develop a greater appreciation and understanding of what is happening in your relationship and how to address it.

Yours in marriage success,

Andrew Rusbatch

Co-author
Save My Marriage Today

Role of Counseling



Dear Save My Marriage Today,

Thank you first of all for your terrific ebooks and website , I have found them really inspiring , I only wish I had purchased them earlier before things went really wrong.

My husband and I have been married for ten years, together for fourteen; we have four children, three young ones of our own and an older daughter from a previous relationship of mine.

Four weeks ago my husband walked out on us saying he just didn't want to do it anymore, that he was unhappy and not "in" love with me anymore. At the same time he had just recently been diagnosed with depression and had started on medication which proved to be wrong for him.

For two weeks he came back and forth talking and saying he wanted to make things work and wanted to come back but he just didn't feel he was ready, then two weeks ago he finally stated that their was no going back - he loved and cared about me but he wasn't "in" love anymore and that he had started to feel this over two years ago but had never mentioned anything as he is not a good communicator.

He does not want to try counseling or any form of therapy and seems to be under the impression that now we can be good friends and life will be great. He is going to get a place of his own (he is staying with friends at the moment) so he can have the children once a fortnight and thinks that we will still be able to go to the same places, parties etc - but just as friends now.

He is only 34 and we have had money problems - but we never fought or argued over this - he says he hates himself for what he has done to me and wishes he felt differently and that things could be different - but he is adamant that it is over and there is nothing more to be done. He has asked that neither of us start seeing other people for a while and that I don't move away from the area - but the decision is up to me (if there is no hope for us I will move out of the town we currently live in), he still rings and drops round from time to time and seems to enjoy the time he spends here - yet he says he doesn't want to be with me or around me.

I value my marriage and really want to keep my family together, my instinct is telling me that he will regret this one day and realize all we have lost - but I don't know whether that's just wishful thinking - I have started to work through your crisis book and have already made a lot of positive changes within myself - but he seems to take these changes to mean that his decision to leave was for the best because everyone is happier and I am moving on. Do you think I have any hope, he keeps saying to me you never know what could happen in the future - and he has made the comment that "it's nothing we can't fix later on if i change my mind" - i really don't know where to go from here? Any ideas?

MY REPLY:

Hi there,

It sounds as though you have had a really difficult time of things dealing with your husband's depression and the breakup of your family and way of life. I have read through your submission closely and can see a number of issues that need to be dealt with.

The first is your husband's depression and his ability to function on the right medication. Finding the correct medication is a difficult process, and finding the correct type of medication and the correct levels of dosage can be an ongoing process. Your husband's refusal to receive any counseling or therapy troubles me. He assumes that by removing himself from the marriage that he is removing himself from the problem, and that his happiness is tied somehow to his ability to change his living arrangements and responsibilities to his wife and children.

He is kidding himself. What this indicates to me is that he doesn't really understand what it is about his life that makes him unhappy. That's where counseling comes in. You need to do everything to encourage him to get some counseling. Medication is only a temporary fix. Counseling will help him actually face and deal with the problems that are affecting him. Even if he doesn't want to go to counseling with you, he could do individual counseling.

He also assumes that you will still be able to go to parties and events but just as friends. It sounds as though he hasn't really considered the implications of divorce. Yes, you can maintain contact on a friendly level, but to assume that you would continue to go to parties together is just plain ignorant. That's just not normal, nor is it fair to you and your feelings.

He tells you that you can go to parties together as friends, and that you should not see anyone for a while, just in case he changes his mind, that you shouldn't move, and that he doesn't want to be around you or with you. This sounds as though he has the best of both worlds. He absolves himself of responsibility to his wife and family, yet believes he can still control how you will live your life without him.

You need to be more assertive. Divorce has consequences. If you want to leave town, you have the right to do so. Tell him. You need to communicate with him how you are feeling when he tells you these things. He expects you to put your life on hold in case he later changes his mind. This is unacceptable, and you need to tell him this. If he divorces you, you will date other people, reduce your contact with him, and shift away. You need to point out to him how his decisions are going to have consequences both for you and for him.

I understand that he is depressed, but he is also being very selfish. His selfish actions have an effect on more than just him and you. You have children to think about too. How do they feel about this? How are they coping? You need to listen to their feelings too.

When he comes over you need to continue to work on your communication and sharing your feelings. Your feelings are just as important as his. It is a difficult situation, but you can't let him walk all over you. He will if you let him. At the moment all of the decisions are centered on what is good for him. It is time you started communicating your feelings to him and making some decisions that are good for you. Hope some of these comments help.



I've bought your book and subscribed to your emails today. My marriage is in crisis and I need some help thanks. My husband and I have been together for 23 years and the first few years were wonderful. However, we have had a lot of stress.

He had 3 young children when we met and his first wife was so angry about him leaving that she cut his children off from him and he hasn't been close to them since. He was devastated. When we had our first child (now 19) his family started to bully me (spite, cold shoulder etc). We went overseas for 3 years to get away. When our daughter was born overseas, we were already starting to have some problems around our different needs for sex.

Also, I fell over when my daughter was 3 months and she got a fractured skull and I felt so dreadful. 3 months later I came down with a form of lymphoma which was treatable but could have been very serious. I don't think we talked much about this. His mother in particular was very cold about it - she asked me who I expected to look after me if I got ill (meaning I hope you don't think it's me)

When we came back to Australia we were not financially well off and our daughter didn't sleep much for over 12 months. His first son confided that he had been sexually abused by the son of his mother's friends, and this person had also tried to abuse the other 2 children without much success. I went to see a psychologist about what we could do, which didn't seem to be a lot. This psychologist told me that she thought that my husband was depressed, and I told him a few months later but he didn't follow it through.

The childcare centre that our daughter was in (I worked 25 hours a week) went into meltdown a year after we returned, and my daughter was affected emotionally. My husband, as the chair of the committee, did a very good job of sorting it out but then there was another crisis with a bookkeeper who was a crook so that went on for about 8 months. When my daughter was 3, I found out that my sister had a child at the same child care centre for 9 months but I didn't know because she hid if I was around. Her husband told my husband as he felt it was wrong. I was devastated that she would do that. My sister had disappeared 10 years previously, leaving her first husband for the now father of her child. I was pretty upset and my sister and I got on OK but were not close, and are not close now. I couldn't talk to my sister about this as she gets very aggressive when questioned.

My son was unhappy in his school at the same time so we moved him to a school he really liked and then found out that the school was in severe financial strife so I spent about 2 years trying to sort it out as a committee member, as it was so good for our son. At the end of the 2 years it failed and then my husband withdrew and became very distant and unloving towards me because of the time I'd spent.

Just 6 months after the school closed down my husband's youngest child was killed in a car accident (he had been drinking and was suffering from depression I think.) This was the only child that tried to maintain contact with my husband so it was a bitter blow for him. 5 months later my husband lost his job because of a government cost cutting drive, and started his own business. I tried very hard to be there for my husband and we grew very close for a couple of years. At the end of the funeral my mother in law apologized for her behavior for the past 11 years, but I found it very hard to accept the apology after

all the hurt that had been heaped on me. My husband went around once in 11 years to stand up for me. He is now alienated from his mother.

At work there has been some bullying, just after my husband's son was killed a few women, including me, were subject to bullying and I moved away when I could about 2 years later. In 2003 I came up against another person who bullied many people in her area including me, but was able to move after 6 months. I am not doing well in my job at the moment because of all the stress of the last 2 years as detailed below.

The last 2 years have been really awful. First, my first husband was diagnosed with cancer and died 6 months later. We both thought highly of him and I found the 6 months really traumatic. Then my father had his leg amputated just after my first husband died, and I went interstate a couple of times to help care for him. He died in March this year after 18 months with not much quality of life. I was the only one keeping him company at the end for 2 weeks as my sister would not see him and my mother decided if he wasn't coming home then she would move on (before he died) My daughter has had major depression for 2 years and was in hospital last year for 4 weeks. My son seems OK at the moment and is doing fine at university.

My husband and I have increasingly argued over the years and the past 2 years have been dreadful. I got more and more angry and upset over the time, about things like my husband not standing up for me with his parents, for his not doing enough around the house, etc. I admit that my behavior became a bit extreme with shouting and some pushing and his way was to back off and close down which only made me worse. After my father died for some reason I started to be able to let go of the anger, but my husband has had enough and wants out.

All he wants is to move out and I've been doing all the wrong things - cajoling and begging etc. He says that he doesn't know how he feels anymore about anything, he finds no pleasure in his hobbies and he has sold all his ham radio gear, is giving up sailing. He says it is because of me and my obsession with work around the house which has caused him to lose interest in everything. He thinks I am mentally unstable and obsessive. Just when I was given insight into how to love him again he is having nothing to do with me. He said he feels 'disconnected' with me. He has also lost any interest in sex at all which is not like him at all, although our sex life hasn't been great for 10 years. He is seeing a counselor at the moment. We are going tomorrow to see a counselor at my request and I think my husband will turn it into a session on how to leave without hurting the children (fat chance)

Anyway, this isn't a soap opera, this is my life so far.

Any insight that you have would be so much appreciated.

MY REPLY:

Hi there,

Thanks for your email. It made very interesting reading, and I have some thoughts as I read through it.

The first observation that I made is that you spend a lot of time telling me about all the things going on around your marriage rather than talking about the specific problems between you and your husband. I wonder if in this respect you are avoiding the real issue.

It certainly sounds as though you have had a rough time of it over the last 23 years, but you must have also had a number of good times and happy occasions. Your focus on the past doesn't tell me much about what is going on right now. A good place to start would be in putting your past behind you and focusing on what the problem is with you and your husband right now.

- 1- Your husband doesn't stand up for you with his parents
- 2- He doesn't do enough around the house
- 3- Your anger issues and inability to let your anger go

These sound like the real problems in your marriage. You need to let all the other stuff go. It is far too negative, and it sounds as though you are spending your life lurching from crisis to crisis. Your children, parents, sisters and brothers and everyone else can deal with their own lives. They are all grown ups now and can deal with their own problems. You can't keep taking on board their problems or it will bury you. Your involvement in so many other people's lives and all this negativity is having an enormously detrimental affect on you and your marriage.

When was the last time you smiled? When was the last time you and your husband did something special together? You need to work on loving your husband again, as well as working on your ability to receive love.

Its time for a little self-examination. Do you think it is easy for your husband to love you? Do you make it easy?

I want you to work through some of the exercises, and look particularly at Chapter 7, Its About You. Take some time out, and develop ways to relax. Find ways to let go of your anger or it will poison you and your relationship. Find ways to be positive and be a nice person to be around.

If you want to save your marriage, you need to make it easy for your husband to be around you. Make your home a positive place. Chapter 5 points out how to invest in your relationship and reconnect with your husband. He says he feels disconnected. So try reconnecting! Be nice to him. Make the time he spends with you a nice time. If he has a nice time when he is around you, he is more likely to stay with you. Make every interaction a positive one.

You talk about him not doing enough around the house. How do you approach this issue? Chapter 4 will tell you how to approach conflicts and negotiate your way to a solution.

You have a lot of good things that you have done together over the last 23 years. Focus on the positives, and the things you love about your husband and the things that have kept you together.

Counseling is a really good idea. You both have a lot of issues, both individually and collectively as a couple.

Good luck



My husband and I have been married 6 years, he started divorce paperwork Saturday and I probably will be handed the paperwork by him next week. I purchased your series back when the marriage started dissolving in June and shared some of it with him, but he became uninterested and I try to be upbeat, but I have so much anger and hurt inside.

Brief history: He told me he was unhappy when we went on a vacation in June and I offered counseling, which we went to until August, where he gave it a try for a while, but then said he was done - again- he said I had not changed. He wanted separation, he left 2 times for a week or 2 each and stayed in family homes when they were out of town. I wanted to leave the house - too many memories, so I moved out (at his urging) or else he would. I thought this would temporary, but after I finally moved out 10/23 he lost all interest, although we got together a few times. I thought we would 'date' each other again, but recent activity shows me he is interested in someone although she may not be interested in him and he's been contacting her since June. He denies it and says he doesn't want to start anything with anyone else (at least for a while). His paperwork coincided with them going to a concert last Friday. I found out that he wants kids now, even though we decided no on that at the beginning of the marriage. I don't know what else to do - he claims we don't communicate, that I don't talk to him and that my parents have been a constant interference since they've been ill the last 3 years. When I try to talk to him, he says I'm accusatory and he gets defensive. We (or he says I) lost interest in relations about 3 years ago. I'm here - he's there - last night after 2 days of no talking and he had me answer these questions:

- 1) Do I believe he really wanted to do this? I said: No, I probably drove you to do this because I hurt you deeply and you saw no other way.
- 2) Do I believe there is a way to be happy after how far everything has gone?

I said: Yes, I believe that people are capable of changing. We stood at an altar and vowed to love each other "till death do us part" and I believe that we can honor that vow and learn to be more loving and connected to each other, even after all that has happened. It is a decision we can make together. We can take it one day at a time and commit to each other for just that day. I also believe that if you are emotionally involved with someone else then it would be impossible to be emotionally involved with each other.

Those questions were posed to me after my last outburst Sunday where he got really upset and really cried for the first time that I've known him. I have been very angry about this and I know that gets me nowhere.

The last 2 weekends I go over there, we fight and end up in bed. Today I went over there and blasted him with every name and everything I could think he's done to me - me being agreeable and sweet and happy go lucky makes him think for some reason I don't care and that this separation divorce is a good thing for him. Then he threatened me with changing the locks and codes to the alarm system and that he'd file next week and that I WOULD sign them. He also has opened new credit cards and bought a new cell phone. I've asked him to go to 2 counseling sessions WITH me, 2 on his own and listen to some marriage CD's I purchased before he files.

How do I turn this around? How do I talk to him?

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

I have read your email carefully, and have identified a number of points I want to discuss. Thank you for the clarity of your writing. I ask clients to be as detailed as possible because I feel it is a useful exercise for you to understand where the issues are at in your marriage. It helps you structure your thoughts, and writing about them can often offer you an insightful perspective on which issues are more important than others. In addition to this, it is a real help to me to know what the issues all are.

The first issue I will look at is your discussion about counseling. You mentioned that you and your husband went to counseling for a couple of months until your husband decided he was done. Where did you feel the counseling helped you discuss your issues, and where do you feel counseling didn't work for you?

The reason I ask this is because I believe you and your husband went into counseling with different beliefs. You may have believed that counseling was going to help you discuss the issues in your marriage and deal with your husband's unhappiness. Your husband, however, may have believed that counseling was simply going to be the catalyst for you changing the behaviors that he did not find desirable. Unless you were both able to be honest about your beliefs surrounding counseling and what you both hoped to achieve from it, it is unlikely that any counseling would have helped. In order for counseling to work, you need to communicate with each other what you hope to achieve. What were your expectations? Were they similar? Counseling was not about you changing. In order for counseling to be effective, you need to both participate actively in it and work towards a common goal. Going into counseling believing that the other person needs to do the changing is counter-productive to the counseling process. I feel this may be one of the reasons the counseling was not as effective as it could have been.

The second point that drew my attention was your decision to shift out. What did you hope to achieve by doing this?

In order for a trial separation to work, you both need to be very clear about what it involves and what expectations you place on each other during the separation period. You also need to both be very clear about what you hope to achieve from this separation agreement. Is this a trial, is it simply giving him some space, or is this a prelude to divorce? You need to be very clear what this is and how you both expect to go about it. You need to be able to sit down and discuss the issues, the point in having a temporary separation and/or a formal agreement, what goals you expect to achieve, how you are going to reach these goals, how often you are going to maintain contact, and what expectations you are going to place on each other regarding dating others, sex, and how you are going to monitor if you are making progress in rebuilding your marriage. It is about much more than simply shifting out to give each other space. Doing this without discussing how you move forward from this is in fact a step backwards and works against you saving your marriage.

Your communication as a couple seems to be an issue, and you highlighted this when you discussed your husband feeling defensive in response to your accusatory tone. This may or may not be true, but if this is the way your husband feels then it is worth looking at. If you are looking at more open ways of communicating without apportioning judgment, I encourage clients to use "I feel" statements, rather

than “you make” or “this is” statements. This brings the feelings back to you and helps explain to your husband why you react the way you do. He doesn’t have to agree with your feelings, but they are nonetheless valid. Progressing on from this is looking at motivations for the feelings you feel, and the things he says that trigger these feelings. This helps encourage both of you to talk about the feelings without attaching blame.

Continuing on from talking about feelings, how did you hurt him deeply, and why do you feel this drove him to do what he is doing? What way can you encourage him to talk about his feelings surrounding this and help validate his feelings with restorative actions? In other words, what way can you communicate to him that you are sorry you hurt his feelings? What ways have you demonstrated that you are sorry?

I am a big believer that like attracts like in a relationship, and you need to consider how your outbursts help the communication process. Blasting him by calling him names and projecting your anger and frustration at him closes down the communication process. The moment you start accusing him of things and raising your voice, communication is shut down. He stops listening and he loses more respect for you. You attacked him and he has responded by threatening to change the locks and alarm system. Like attracts like.

If you want to reopen communication with him you need to do it in a way that validates his feelings so that he feels motivated to reciprocate. Counseling is about finding ways to communicate and investigate the issues in your marriage. It is not about one person doing all the work and the other simply attending. It is not about apportioning blame. It is about both of you actively participating in the process and taking responsibility that you both have opportunities to learn.

Your husband and you don’t communicate well because you choose to not understand each other. Stop apportioning blame and start using “I feel” statements. Talk about your feelings. Talk about your emotions. Talk about why you are both going to counseling. Talk about how much you love each other and how you wish the fighting would stop. And both of you talk about what you can both learn from counseling and from each other.

Talking about these things exposes a level of vulnerability that may make you uneasy, but it is the only way to move forward and it is the only place from which love can flourish again.



Communication



I just read the book and I need to see if you have some suggestions. I have been married to my wife for 10 years. This is both of our second marriages. She is the love of my life. She is not just my wife but my best friend. Things have been great up to the last 6 months. Last Aug. I found out that my wife was visiting a male friend of us both. I confronted both of them at separate times and told them of my concern. My wife explained that she knew I would be upset if I knew. To make matters worse when I first asked her about it she lied to me. Only after i told her I talked with our friend she admitted to it. This made me fill betrayed. Both has assure me it is nothing sexual just a friendship. My wife comes from a hard background. She had a gun put to her head by her ex-husband and raped. Her dad growing up abused her. She has been living on the streets since she was 12. My wife is legally blind. She turns 40 this year and she is scared because 2 brothers and a sister have all died in their 40's. Her dad died when he was 52. With all that said as background here is what the problem is. She says that I have crushed her by caring to much. I do admit that from work I call her 10 times a day. I guard against her highly because of her eyes. What has made this all worse is that this friend of ours has had a hard life to and they talk together to help each other out. I see NO evidence that an affair has happened. But she says I question her to much about them being together and now she feels like I don't trust her. Looking back when this first happened I told her that I forgave her for lying to me and that i would not bring it back up again. I have kept my part and do not bring it back up however I believe deep down that I have a mistrust problem and she says she can not live with that. She knows that I love her very much. Last night I ask her if she still loves me and she says yes but she is very mad and highly angry with me. She said she needs some space. This friend of ours just got a divorce and has his own apartment. He has told her if she needs time to think that she could come stay in the spare bedroom for awhile. I disagree with this. If she needs time I can put her up in a motel for a week or so but going to him makes me feel hurt all over again. She says that she has sacrificed so much for me and the kids that she just needs to spread her wings a little. I know I have done some wrong like being over protective and over caring and jealous issue. I do know for a fact that my wife is better friends with the male figure then with females. She has been like that since I known her. We both agree that we do not want a divorce but seem like we cannot get past this point right now. Our "sex" life has even been good up to this last week when this has really taken off. I have backed off like only calling her once a day now and stopped questioning her about our friend when he comes over but she says she is still so mad at me. Any suggestions on how to get pass as she has put it "bump" in the road? How to get her pass the hurt she says she has and anger? I know that when she says she fills like I don't trust her comes from her ex-husband as he questioned her all the time and I have caused a "flashback" in her memory. Please help as I don't want to lose not only my wife but my best friend.

MY REPLY:

Hi,

Thanks for your email. A lot of my clients email me because they don't care about their spouses enough, so it is very refreshing to hear from someone who has so much love and devotion to their partner.

However, in saying this, I can identify where there is a real problem. Your need to call your wife 10 times a day is a little excessive, and in this instance it is fair that your wife could misinterpret your contact as a lack of your trust in her. What is your motivation in calling her so often, and in what way do you believe your frequency of calls is going to enable you to protect your wife better? I understand your possible wish to protect her, but the reality is that your phone calls are not going to protect her from harm. At some stage you need to let go and have a little faith in your wife's ability to look after herself. In fact, she may even find this quite empowering.

Perhaps some of this hurt could have been avoided through better communication skills as a couple, both in your ability to voice your intentions and motivations in maintaining contact with your wife, but also in your ability to listen and respond to your wife's desire for independence and space. It is important to remember that her desire for space doesn't mean she doesn't love you anymore. It just means that she needs you to back off a bit and have some faith in her and her ability to live as an adult.

It is time for you to listen to what your wife is telling you, and give her some space. Your jealousy and over protective nature implies that you do not trust her, and further attempts to protect her will only push her further away. Tell her you are prepared to back off and give her some space, but that you need some guidelines from her as to regular contact and how often she feels it would be appropriate. Let her have some input into where she feels you should both go from here. Not only will this tell you how she feels, but it empowers her in sharing input into finding a resolution to this issue.

Kind regards,

Andrew



Hi, I've purchased your book and read the first half of the book, which I think is more related to me because I am not married yet and of course have no children. I think that me and my boyfriend have almost gone through most of the stuff that you discussed on in your book.. However, i am still confused about what i should do to safe my relationship. He is beginning not to care about the relationship anymore. I have posted in the forum but it seems that I really need to get a solution as soon as possible.. So, here is what I have posted on the forum:

Me and my boyfriend are not married yet. We think that right now it's too early for marriage and we still have some responsibilities to carry, such as graduating from university. However, we are serious about this relationship. We have touched on marriage issues before. Not long after we became a couple, we have to go trough a long-distance relationship and it is still going till now. It has been 2 years and 3 months. Our long-distance relationship goes beyond than just being in two different cities. The first and a half years of our long-distance relationship went as far as being in two different parts of the globe. He was in Canada and I was in Asia. Luckily, now we have become closer but not together due to some reasons. He is still in Canada and I am in US. However, he planned to move to US this August to be with me. We are really so happy about it. However, right now our relationship seems to be not as how it is supposed to be. My boyfriend is a jealousy-kind of person and not open to strangers. On the other hand, I am more to the socialized-kind of person. We have been quarreling a lot about how I should spend my time and who I should not be with. He dislikes it when I am with other guys. He does not like

it when I keep in touch, hang out, and take pictures with other guys. Anything related to other guys. Well, he did tell me why. It is because we are having a long distance relationship, he can only judge my feelings and loyalty to him through my actions. He was very afraid that he would lose me to other guys. So, after he explained to me his reasons of being so obsessive, I came to understand him more. However, there are still times where I needed friends.. It's not that I need to be with other guys but I just need people to hang out with when I was not with my boyfriend, and it happened that my girl friends brought along guys with them. In addition to that, there are more guys than the girls in my group. This makes him unhappy for a lot of times. He feels that if I am with other guys, that means I am cheating on him. The fact is I never cheated on him, and it is never come close to my mind. I do really love my boyfriend and I want to make him happy. The issues about me being with other guys are never ending. He would get angry for today, we solved the problem, he forgave me and we are happy again. But later on, few days.. few weeks later.. when I tried to refresh up a little bit by going for a movie with my friends (and there were guys.. they are my friends' friends), he would be angry and bring back everything that he thought I did wrong.. he felt cheated and hurt. This happened a lot of times. The result is that right now he feels that he could not trust me anymore.. he feels that I took him for granted. In fact, I don't. I still appreciate him a lot. I just need life sometime. I already told him that I am willing to change for the better. I am willing to change for the sake of our relationship. now, I can tell that I've improved quite a lot. now, if my friends asked me to hang out, etc.. I would think about him first. there are a lot of times that I rejected their invitations of having lunch together. seriously, now i don't really mind for not having the 'free' life that I used to be in order to be with my boyfriend. It is because our 2 years plus of hard time is finally going somewhere. There is this road that is opened for us. we are going to be together again in a few months time. We were not able to be together before due to our studies. previously, it was really hard for us to be together.. However now here comes the big problem. within the 2 years, there were so much hurting going on. he becomes more "closed" to me.. he told me that he could not trust me like he used to be, nor he could easily forget about the past. He is disappointed at me. I really regret for what I have done.. and ready to take a step back.. changing myself for the better.. to be a good girlfriend that he always wanted me to be. When I told him this, he asked me to back to my old-self.. the "socialized"-me. He wanted me to spend time with other guys again, etc. He decided not to restrict me anymore. He wants me to be myself. However, right now I feel that I've changed.. that's no longer me.. this is me now.. but he still doesn't want me to be like this. He is giving me an option..

- 1) go back to be my old self,
- 2) be like what i am now BUT our relationship is trough.

Of course I do not want to end our relationship.. It's not that easy to throw away the feeling and memories we shared. I think it is so silly to end our relationship after we have seen that there is the future for us. But at the same time, I do not want to go back to my old self.. because i know very well that it WILL only hurt him. I asked him why he wanted me to be like that.. but he refused to answer it and asked me to shut up. I am really confused now and don't know what to do. I will do anything to save our relationship. He also does not like it if I talked about other people while we are talking on the phone or chatting on MSN. He feels that it is just a waste of time and he prefers me not to call him if i will only talk about other people. well, my main purpose of calling him is because i want to be with him.. that's the only way we can spend time together. Firstly I will talk about what happened to me, etc.. about personal stuff. However, I feel that our conversation does not have to end right after I talk about me personal stuff.. that is why i would begin talking about what is happening around me. I just want to keep us communicating with each other. I really need help with this relationship. I still love him a lot. and i know that he [b]still[/b] loves me, too, despite the fact that he gave hurtful comments about me when

he was angry and how he denied that he did not want to be with me anymore... i know it is all lies. I am able to take all this because i tried to understand his situation and his character. He is a very stubborn person with high self-esteem. He can be very harsh when is angry but he can also be very sweet when he's cool.. he also has made me to be a better person. This morning, he was angry. he still could not get over the stuff that we have been arguing for so long. He told me not to contact him anymore.. but i know i could not do that. he told me once that if he is angry, don't let him alone just like that.. in fact he really wants me to contact him. but there is also a lot of times that he got irritated if i contacted him when he is angry. I really don't know what to do. I think that's the overall idea about my relationship with my boyfriend. I apologize if it's hard to understand because I am very confused on where should I start and talk about to give the right picture about my relationship. This situation makes me feel unstable and i would be really really glad if there is anybody who can give solution to these problems. I don't want the relationship to end.. please safe us

Thank you very much for spending your time on reading my letter. I am really in need of help and I need help that will work. I did not know who to turn to but I came across your website. I think you are experienced enough in handling relationship and should be able to help me. I apologize for any trouble that I make and thank you very much.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email. I recognize the effort that must have gone into putting your thoughts down in words, and it gives me a very clear indication of what is going on in your relationship and the areas that you need to work on.

Long-distance relationships are really hard, and when these types of relationships are maintained over a sustained period of time it is much more difficult to overcome issues than normal relationships. Interpersonal communication is a vital component of a relationship, and I feel that this lack of person-to-person contact is one factor in your relationship problem. When you are speaking to your boyfriend on the phone, he is unable to see your body language or inflection on certain words or terms.

Another factor is the length of time you are apart. People change over time, and the aspirations and goals at one time may be a little different after two years. This is nothing to be ashamed of. It is social and emotional evolution, particularly the way people and events shape your consciousness. It is great that you feel commitment and love for one another, but after two years apart, there will be large parts of each others spirit that you don't know about.

Let's look at your boyfriend's fear of rejection. He fears losing you to another guy, but in doing so, he overlooks the commitment you have made to him over the last two years. You need to explain to him that if you did not love him, it would have been very easy for you to break up with him and walk away, but the fact you haven't is indicative of how seriously you take this relationship.

However, it is equally important to maintain a social life, especially in light of the distance between the two of you. Spending time in the company of other men does not mean you are going to cheat on him, but if he feels this way it is his problem, not yours. He needs to trust you in the same way you trust him. Without his trust, your relationship is in jeopardy.

Ask him why he feels cheated and hurt. If he does not trust you, he needs to make a greater effort to get to know you better. With knowledge comes trust. With trust comes love.

The most important point I will offer you here is to be yourself. If he truly loves you, he will love you the way you are, not the way he would like you to be.



My husband and I have been married for just over 5 years and were together for 2 1/2 years prior to our marriage.

For the first 6 years of our relationship we were very happy and got along well. We seldom fought and thought we were good at communicating and solving issues.

3 1/2 years ago we moved from Australia to London. Our first 18 months were very happy here and we felt closer together. Then things began to change. In hindsight I had let my anxiety levels loose by planning to much - money, travel - and was too long term focused. Paul felt that we should be doing some of that stuff but enjoying our lives today. As i focused on this he began to withdraw till eventually I was doing everything to manage our lives and he was doing nothing.

The first time we properly discussed it he told me that he thought things would just go along and then we would break up. I was shocked and horrified as I was very committed and couldn't imagine this happening. We then spent 8 months trying to fix things - I backed off on money and travel but he couldn't seem to get better. We went and saw a marriage counselor who said he didn't understand why we were there. We both did identify some issues with our upbringing. The counselor said he thought we were fine and Paul agreed so we stopped going.

Paul then became down again and finally in the July told me he wanted to move out for a while. I was terrified and upset but took it quite calmly. Before he left he wrote me a letter telling me how much he loved me and that he was sure that we could work it out. For the first couple of months things were quite good as we were dating and both felt positive. But then again he seemed to be unable to move on and began to see a counselor on his own last October. Things quickly got worse after this. Paul had many unresolved issues from childhood including an abusive alcoholic stepfather who he discovered at 18 wasn't his father. I also had a lot of issues with my mother that I needed to resolve and went to counseling myself.

Early in the New Year we agreed that we should be dating and having fun together. This continued and went well. This has been going on for several months and he will have several periods where he talks a lot about our future together and returning to Australia together. We have discussed the marriage about every 2 months and although every time he tells me that he wants the marriage back and thinks I've resolved a lot of the issues he had things don't seem to progress a lot.

We have now been separated for nearly a year but during that time have not gone more than 48 hours without contact. We have good nights out together and can talk easily. However, i have no idea when he thinks we should move back in together. I don't really know where I stand and this is making me very uncomfortable. I feel that I have become needy and clingy which is not characteristic of me.

My closest friends and therapist believe he is progressing and that as difficult as it is I should hang in there. My gut feel is that it will be ok but it is very difficult to keep my emotions under control regarding the situation. I'm not ready to walk away - especially as he is making progress - but I want to be happily married again as soon as is reasonably possible.

I would appreciate any advice on how to cope with this situation and how to potentially resolve it.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

Yours is a common marriage situation, and one I find is increasingly common for younger couples who are looking at making their way in life rather than middle-aged couples who may already be well on their life path.

One of the issues I can identify here is your eagerness to organize and plan your life and future according to your belief system. While you may feel this was the socially responsible thing to do, and the focus gave great clarity to where you saw yourself in life and where you were going as a couple, it did not allow a couple of key factors: creativity and personal growth.

Sometimes you can be so hell-bent on achieving your perceived life goals that you discover your values or goals have changed once you have reached your goal destination. While it is great to have goals, you also need to allow space for life experience and personal growth. The goals you set yourself as a 25 year old may not be the goals you have when you reach 30. That's because you may be a different person by the time you reach that time in the future. Perhaps your husband's reluctance reflected his feelings about living for the future rather than the present.

I noted with interest your husband's comments about "enjoying our lives today" compared to your comment about "doing everything to manage our lives". Your husband wants to live in the present without the pressure that "managing" creates. Managing creates expectation, and this may not be something your husband wants to face at this stage.

I would recommend you sit down as a couple and re-examine your expectations of your relationship and of each other. Are your expectations reasonable? Are your expectations fun?

Some of the most interesting people I know have no idea where their lives are taking them, but they have something special: they have faith that their beliefs will create reality and that what will happen will indeed happen regardless of whether you manage it or not. Some days I wake up and have no idea of what I want to do for the day. Some part of that is quite special.

Allow space in your life for creativity and spontaneity. Perhaps your husband wants to live in the present. I get a strong feeling he does. Perhaps he wants a greater stake in how you live your lives as a couple.

Regarding your neediness issues, you need to spend some time examining what it is in life that makes you happy. What passions do you have? Sports? Hobbies? Something that really interests you and gives you passion. It is imperative that this is something that you do on your own. It might be a craft or something as simple as reading a book or walking. You need to learn to be comfortable in your own company and in the fact that if you and your husband are going to get back together, it will happen. Being impatient isn't going to hurry the process along. Patience and listening will. You need to develop strategies for keeping your emotions in check and ways to calm yourself. Walking, meditation, listening to music, swimming, yoga, creative writing. You need to let your emotions out and channel them into something other than managing your future and your husband.

Don't be in any rush to pickup where you left off and live the rest of your life. This is not a race.



Can I talk or write to you regarding my marriage? I found your book clicking into place with me right left and centre. The quiet alarm bells of what I thought (if I thought at all!) was right was entirely wrong. Did I do this that and the other well in truth I did and now my wife has filed for divorce. On reading your book I would divorce me too! We are living apart have 5 kids 3 from her first marriage and 2 from ours. We have known each other for 41 years as our parents were good friends as students. I would like to be able to chat or mail you if possible. I am very focused on repairing the situation and have changed myself, my outlook and my attitude dramatically. However, my wife says she doesn't feel anything for me at all...and there is nothing there. She is crying and laughing with me so I have to put her no feeling to one side. As you mentioned in your book, love is an action not a feeling... interesting perspective which I will try and get across. I run my own business and have been 24/7 throughout the marriage. Taken it home, almost used my home and family as an emotional punch bag for my frustrations and stresses of the day. Ugly behavior which is why I understand NOW why I would have divorced me!!! My wife had a fling not fully physical as she describes it which devastated me. All my hair fell out and it just gave me another excuse to be angry. I wanted another child, like 5 wasn't enough, and put her under pressure which she repelled...I thought she didn't care or love me and added more pressure, and guess what here we are now writing to you saying to myself I'm a total pig and trying to put it right.

I have reversed my behavior to the point where my wife was scared of me. Couldn't understand my change of approach. This is all happened in the last 4/5 months. last week we went out for dinner and a talk. I was listening to her and we had a wonderful evening. We agreed to stop some of the action in court which she has done. not the divorce sadly. However, my solicitor wrote a snippy letter, without my knowledge, after we had agreed this wouldn't happen any more which upset my wife. We sat and spoke Saturday and she was back to the I feel nothing for you whilst crying with me. She told there has been too much hurt.. which all i want to do is put right...she said she didn't want to see me for at least a couple of weeks, however, we did agree to meet tomorrow for our little one's birthday and strangely enough on Thursday just on our own for dinner. I love her so very deeply and I am changing and challenging my own behavior constantly as clearly what i had done before was not working and therefore to repeat that behavior would be insane. Help advice and any special tips that would show her how deep, sincere and meaningful my motive is.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

It sounds as though reading our book has spawned a deeply reflective time for you, and this deep reflection has helped you view your marriage situation from a different perspective. From this aspect, your approach has been a success because you are able to see and understand where your marriage had its deficits, and where the harm was.

Hindsight is a powerful thing, and is regarded by many as a bit of a luxury. While you can see where things went wrong in your past, the real challenge lies with how you choose to react to it.

It sounds as though your transformation has been dramatic, but instead of your wife choosing to be scared because it seems too good to be true, she needs to understand that your motivation is in the high value you place on her being your wife.

Nothing you say is going to make the scars of the past go away, but you have to have faith in the fact that your transformation is going to take quite some time for your wife to get used to. If the patterns of behavior in your marriage have been negative for many years, it is going to take a while before your wife is ready to have trust in your transformation and believe that this is a life-change, not a passing fad.

Keep focusing on your behavior and rebuilding trust. I think you are doing really well.

HIS REPLY:

Hi Andrew,

Thank you very much for your comments. Our boys birthday was a great success but my wife was quite cold towards me in a friendly way if that's possible.

What I didn't tell you in my last mail is to have me thrown out the house my wife called social services which involved the police and made allegations against me in regard to inappropriate behavior with my step daughters. The result was straight forward as far as the police were concerned and absolutely no action of any type was taken. However, as my wife had then stated this in an affidavit for occupation of our home she managed to spin these allegations out by gaining the help of sister. She saw a solicitor left the house and took the children to a hotel. I didn't see any of them as she created herself in the role of protector against the big monster. 14 weeks and £50k later the judge stated "this case had the hallmarks of sexual abuse and clearly there is none. The mother now admits that this is the case" Not that I expected any other result. I do think that now her side show there is over I think she does know that in that regard she was wholly wrong in putting our daughters through child protection procedures. When I was first asked not to go back to my house my daughters were texting me saying "what is going on?" "We are confused" "We love you" etc.

4 months later they don't wish to see me at all. Now although I appreciate this is only temporary it is very hard and harsh of my wife to have alienated them against me. She has told them things i would never have dreamed of sharing with them and the effect has been to endorse the 'monster' theory.

Believe it or not I am not angry with my wife at all. I am very sad that she felt so unable to talk to me, back to my behavior that she had to resort to such desperate tactics. Hence why my first mail to you was the context of my bad behavior and not what she had done.

We had dinner last night which wasn't as pleasant as the previous week as some of the very thorny issues above were raised and talked about. Secondly, the judge will scrutinize both of us now and there are certain elements which we can do without being too closely looked at such as finances etc. She has dropped the financial suit this week which is a first step. I asked her to drop the divorce all together and perhaps in 6 months time we could go for a quiet do it yourself divorce in another court. It would mean that we could make our own decisions about the children and not be dictated to.

She said she would think about it.

The second thorny issue was our daughters. I asked her for a family meeting so we could set the record straight regarding what would be going on and how I would be providing for them...university fees. My wife has made comments to our eldest about economy drives because I hadn't adequately provided for them which is a nonsense. I pay everything and then extra on top. That is my commitment to her and my step children, although I have never seen them as any other than my children, when we married and I will always honor that regardless of whether we end up divorced.

Throughout the evening there was various amounts of misty teary eyes, no outbursts....she did at one point ask if she had come for me to have a go at her and I said no. I wanted to know if she understood that what she did by putting the kids through those procedures was completely out of order...She took it on board and i told her that I understood her hurt and anger with me and her wanting me out the house, (which i did voluntarily as i couldn't stand my kids not being there own home) but to use the kids in that way and then to further alienate them from me to justify what she had started was wholly cruel. But again I understood her motive in wanting to be rid of me and away from her as soon as she possibly could.

Last night I listened to her whist she told me the hurt and humiliation i had brought upon them all. I took her point and just listened. Right or wrong I quietly and calmly agreed. I understood her and encouraged her to tell me what she had to say.

She said that didn't love me and said I thought that was very sad because I love her, I always have and I always will. Walking back to the car I put my jacket around her because she was cold and tired and probably just had enough, (learning to read the signs ... pennies dropping etc) and told how much I cared for her and that I will do everything I can to put as much right as I possible. We got back to the car and I sat with her for a moment and told I would wait for her, she responded with you could be waiting a very long time if not forever, and i said I would wait for her but i wouldn't wait forever. I asked for a kiss and she said just on the cheek which she then leant over and kissed me on the cheek and I left.

My apologies this has turned into a novel, your remarks inspired me to write more and thank you. I have taken on board how my motivation lies in how much I value her as my wife....thank you and how this will take a long time...I am learning tolerance, patience and understanding...oh to have been born or brought up with those attributes consistently would have been a blessing! Again your quiet confidence is reassuring. Thank you. Am I able to save my marriage?

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email. Your explanation of what has been going on in your marriage certainly puts things in greater context. I really do think you must be one of the most patient people I have ever heard of, and considering the false allegations your wife has brought against you and the way she has poisoned your children against you, you could be forgiven for being much less conciliatory.

One of the biggest casualties in conflicts like this is the children, and your wife does herself and her children no favors. As much as she may be angry with you, the children still need a father. Parents who use their children to carry out personal vendettas have given all parents in marriage situations a bad reputation and it is gratifying to see legal services starting to identify cases where allegations are falsified and children are used as weapons in marital wars.

I believe your wife needs quite some time to process her anger and work through it. In the meantime, your measured yet consistent patience is the best way of maintaining contact with your wife and children. You have been far more patient than your wife deserves, and this is a credit to you.

The next step for you is to focus on your sense of self and what it takes to be happy as an individual. Being happy within yourself and not placing expectations of happiness on those around you is the key to greater emotional maturity. In the midst of your hurt you are able to radiate your peace and understanding to others, and to love her despite the hurt she has caused is very precious.

With patience I believe you have every chance of saving your marriage, and you will. I know you believe this too. Repeat this affirmation every day.

HIS REPLY:

Hi,

Thank you for your response. I am so grateful to you. The tears were welling up as I read your mail as they do now as I respond.

I can assure you my patience is a very new and my approach is born out of so many years of impatience, anger and general over the top behavior. My lack of tolerance is another contributor to my transformation. It is for these reasons that I am not angry with my wife. I just can't feel these irritated, overbearing sometimes bullying types of behavior my wife so harshly complained....Perhaps I simply accept that I brought this situation upon myself and she felt she had no option but throw absolutely everything at me. A friend said to me that it was like the pendulum had swung so far in her direction she had to hit it so hard back that it put me right into the place she had found herself.

When this first came about I had to make undertakings to the court, (guilty until proven innocent), not Harass, Molest, Pester either my wife or daughters and not to contact my daughters or coerce any third party to do so on my behalf, not to go to my home or attempt to enter my home. I was in between a rock and a hard place and therefore volunteered to do so rather than be ordered by the court. Now we are through this craziness I would like to have those undertakings discharged. I have been told I could apply to the court and they would release me, however, I would like to do this with the agreement of my wife and am unsure as to how to approach her on it. When I spoke to her on Saturday she was back freezer mode which I did not rise to her frostiness and the conversation was very short.

I will email you later as I need to review my mail to you. My behavior has been appalling at times and I need to make sure you do have all the facts as I am now aware that any small detail which is missed could be vital in this process. I have decided not to call my wife today. I have a counseling session with therapist from the institute of family therapy tomorrow. I had considered inviting my wife, however, I am concerned she may try and call the therapist as a witness. This of course would be very bad for me as I might have been an ass for the last few years but if only one thing I am honest to myself and therefore others around me. I would not like my wife to have another change of heart and have this session brought up in court. What do you think?

Thank you again and thank you for my mantra.

MY REPLY:

Your emails gave me a lot of food for thought, and I have to thank you for the thorough and concise way you explained your problems to me. It certainly seems that you have a good understanding of the person you were in the past, and your desire to change your behavior is to be commended. A lot of people understand they have marital problems without having the slightest idea of what exactly contributed to them and how they are going to fix their problems.

I am proud of the self-examination you have undertaken, and agree with your pendulum theory in your wife's reaction to your behavior. While it does not excuse her behavior, it goes some way towards explaining what motivated her to act.

So you are both at the stage where you have hurt each other deeply, and your focus from here needs to be on letting go of your past hurts and focusing on your future. You recognize your contribution to the problems you have at the moment, but it is not healthy to dwell on it for too long.

You need to focus on losing control of the situation and being okay with that. One of the wonderful things about being humans is our capacity to stuff things up and make mistakes. If you don't make mistakes, there is no way of learning. It's okay to be wrong sometimes, and for your pride to admit that you got it wrong. That's part of accepting that you aren't perfect but still being comfortable in your partner's love. I am the first to admit I am not perfect, but that it's okay. My partner loves me anyway.

Take a look at your triggers, and what motivates you in your overbearing behavior. What things set you off? Take a look at your triggers and your responses. Why do your triggers elicit such an aggressive response? Do you feel threatened? Does it attack your credibility? Self-esteem? Is it a historical thing? Did your parents act the same way?

Once you understand your triggers, examine your reactions and how they are appropriate or inappropriate. What way do you feel your reactions could do with improvement? What way can you react that gets your feelings across in a less-aggressive manner?

It's time to pick yourself up and stop beating yourself up about the past. This is all now outside your control. What you can control now is your future, and how you choose to act from now on. Your consistency in your positive approach will win your wife's trust.

Love is about much more than words and saying sorry. It is also in your actions. Take a look at my chapter on "Love is a Doing Word" for ways to show your wife love through actions.

Repeat these affirmations every day

I love my wife more each day.
My love will overcome her fears
My perseverance will bring us closer together
I can't change my past but I can control my future.
My belief in our love is a reality

Kind regards,

Andrew

HIS REPLY:

Hi Andrew,

It is a long uphill struggle if i wish to view it that way on the other hand to retain the value that I love my wife more each day and we will ultimately be together lends strength and resolute determination of that result.

Something I wanted to share with you that I discovered through my therapy. The most important wee souls in break down is our children and what i discovered about myself and perhaps this could be true for many parents is when challenged is that we too resort to behaving like children. I do not mean we are childish in the silly sense I mean reverting to behavior we demonstrated as a child when challenged by our parents. For example I would dig my heels in the ground when my mother would attempt to bully or intimidate me...my wife would do anything for a quiet life and hide in the large family she was part of when her mother did the same to her. So in conflict we resort to acting in the way we did when challenged as a child and loose our adulthood which in other circumstances we would reflect.

Take the conflict route. My wife wants something. In the past, inherently there is competition, I return to being a child and dig in my heels.....she returns to being a child and is submissive. I am no expert; however, one is being domineering and the other submissive through historical traits. To share this with you is to create change and to recognize it may help others. I'm sure you know this already. I hope others are able to pick this up before they find themselves in the mess that we are currently in.

I know my marriage will work. If not now, in the future. We may end up being divorced, I hope not, although I have to concede it is merely a legal state and the relationship, I believe, will flourish in the future at some point.

Thank you.



Thank you for your great insights as to the trials and tribulations of suffering marital disorder and stress. I do have one question that I hope you or one of your associates may be able to answer. I am having a very difficult time to get my spouse to communicate with me and speak with me and I think it is because she has lied and been very deceitful with me for the past 8 or so months with what she has been doing unbeknownst to me.. Actually it is quite a complicated story and I will not get into it. but I am willing to forgive and forget and the only way I can communicate with her at this time is thru emails which in my opinion is very unsatisfactory, but it is all I have to work with now... I believe she is moving forward with a divorce, which bothers me of course. But I guess what my question is ... as a spouse who does not want a divorce... can I contest it? And is there anyway I can possibly convince her to go see a marriage counselor before we pull the plug... to this day I do not know what happened in our marriage or why she wants a divorce and this is tearing my heart out... we have been married for over 6 years and I am 24 years her senior... we have had a great marriage in my opinion and she is unwilling to explain her motives for a divorce and I am trying everything I know of to get her to communicate with me.. I have been very sweet to her and I just do not understand why she will not communicate with me...and or what I can say or do to get her to agree to see a marriage counselor. Thank You

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

The difficult thing with a marriage breakdown is that no matter what your partner has done to you, it is difficult to simply stop loving them. I believe this is the situation you are in with your wife, and no matter how much she may have lied or deceived; your commitment to saving your marriage is to be commended.

Communicating with your wife only by email is an unsatisfactory situation, but if it is the only avenue of communication available then you have to make the most of it. Getting your wife to go to counseling with you is going to be a difficult task, especially when she seems so resistant to the idea. If possible, it might be more beneficial getting an objective third party to talk to her. This could be a friend or someone she listens to. It might even be a pastor or a family member of hers. The idea here is not to get someone to do the convincing for you, but someone who can present the facts in an objective fashion, without judgment or emotion.

Has she considered how long a divorce can take? Has she considered the financial implications of dividing the marital assets and supporting herself? Has she considered the cost of living and the impact on her life both in the short-term and long-term? The implications of a divorce are significant, and can affect both the physical, financial and even emotional lives of both partners for many years. Divorce is seldom as simple as people imagine it to be, and it seldom brings the feelings of closure or satisfaction that people think it will as well. In fact, if people fully understood the emotional and financial isolation that a divorce brings, they would realize that in many cases divorce is not the easier option. Considering the huge impact of divorce, it makes sense to explore the idea of counseling or at least make an attempt to communicate.

If someone is able to present the facts of divorce to her so she fully understands what she is getting into, you may be able to make some progress and open a dialogue. Other than that, you need to focus on making each interaction with her as positive as possible. While you may not be able to physically love your wife, staying as positive as possible in your interactions with her is going to maximize your chances of saving your marriage. If you contest the divorce or fight her, it will only encourage her to fight harder.



My wife, Terri and I have been having troubles for some time. Terri's estimate is that she has been hurting for 2 years. We have tried counseling with very little success. The problems keep arising. Neither of us seems to want to see the other person's side.

We have even just recently had a big talk where we agreed to a divorce, only to later that same night cuddle in bed and I offered a chance of a new beginning, seemingly to her approval. Unfortunately we both were waiting for the other to make some big change and then one fateful night, when I was drunk from an all day party, she reacted to unkindness by me and a major fight ensued. She claimed that I frightened her with an alleged threat of physical harm. We both have that in our histories, though not with each other. Terri's most vocalized complaints against me are that she does not feel cherished by me, and that I have put her third in my priorities, second to me and my children.

Well, Terri moved out while I was away for a week. I had a feeling that this would happen, and sure enough it did. I, while away, came to a new realization that I truly want her in my life and am ready to do whatever it takes. Problem being, just yesterday Terri called me and told me that she needs to be left alone. Since I got home from my week away I have been calling her often and I would have to admit that I begged her not to divorce me, that we could work it out. Right now Terri seems to be directing a lot of anger at me. I do not know where she is living, and I have been supportive of a separation so that we can get ourselves straight. Terri responds that I have a lot of work to do, and I agree to that and say that I will do whatever it takes.

I retired 4 years ago and Terri is still working. We make the same income, yet Terri makes me pay a larger share of the household expenses since I have a son with us every other week. I am okay with this arrangement but it does cramp me occasionally. So finances are a bit of a problem too. Just yesterday she complained that it cost some amount to retain an attorney, I don't know what for, I have not been served with any papers, but I am just waiting for that shoe to drop. Oh, the other thing that she says is that she is just not sure that we are meant to be together. I disagree.

I would like to share these books with her; do you think that is a good idea?

Any recommendations on opening up the lines of communication between us?

I feel like time is working against us.

I was trying to do the nice little things that would help us and keep the lines open.

Since Terri is still working I used to cook for her on her work days, so I called her and offered to be her personal chef a couple days a week, she could come by and pick up the meal and take it home if she wanted. Yesterday she said that was not a good idea.

This call came the morning after she had a session with her counselor, who I was warned about by my counselor, that she takes sides.

Aaaaccckkkk! What do I do? Any input is gratefully accepted.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

I can identify a number of significant issues in your marriage, and the largest of these is your inability as a couple to communicate effectively. Both of you believe the other is wrong, both of you want to view the issues from a perspective other than your own, and both of you are expecting the other to be the one to initiate the change.

This is an impossible situation, and one that will cost both of you your marriage if you don't snap out of it. Marriage, and in particular real love, is not about always being right. Learning how to love your partner properly is about accepting that sometimes you will get it right and other times you will get it wrong. The important thing is that you are able to learn from these times.

You are both approaching your marital issues as individuals rather than looking at what is in the collective good. How important is it that you are correct all the time? Is it worth sacrificing your marriage? Similarly, why do you feel it is impossible to see things from your wife's perspective?

When we argue, we are reacting to situations according to the circumstances we are in and the values we have. When something threatens those values, we react to this and challenge the behavior, or in your instance, the person. I want you to take the time to try and see things from your wife's perspective. What do you feel is the issue for her? What values do you feel she is defending? What is motivating her to act the way she does?

I want you to do something called active listening. This is when you cease the voice in your head, cease anticipating a response, cease justifying your actions, and simply listen to what your wife is trying to tell you. Say nothing, just listen and really hear her words. Identify with her feelings. Imagine yourself as she sees things. Then I want your wife to do the same when you speak. Just as it is important to say how you feel, it is equally important to show your partner respect by actively listening to her and letting her feel as though she has some input. Marriage is a partnership. You and your wife have been acting as individuals and this mentality is going to be hard to break and modify.

I can see blame on both sides, and you both have areas that you need to work on. I understand that you are both at loggerheads, but the one thing that you should both have in common is that you are both committed to the relationship.

When you have the opportunity, sit down with your wife and make a list of things that you can agree on. Then for every thing that you don't agree on, I want you to both list one thing that you can do to work on yourselves and make this better. You list something you need to work on, and your wife can list something that she needs to work on. Do this for every item or issue you disagree on.

Terri seems to be directing a lot of anger at you. Terri believes that you have a lot of work to do. Terri needs to get real. As part of being a married couple, if you have a problem, she has a problem. There is no such thing as one person fixing a marriage crisis. If you are both committed to the relationship you both have a lot of work to do.

You should never shift out as a means of punishing your partner, and Terri needs to consider how her separation is going to help the communication process. She needs to tell you where she is staying, provide you with a contact number, and give you an indication of when and how regularly you are going to meet up and discuss the issues. If she is unwilling to do this, then she is opting out of the marriage.

The fact that you divide your income concerns me. If Terri feels motivated to have separate income and separate paying of expenses, she is not living as part of a couple. Choosing to split the expenses and have individual incomes goes against what marriage is all about. Marriage is about sharing income, expenses, sharing thoughts and ideas, sharing dreams and aspirations, and sharing love.

Your communication as a couple is appalling, and I can understand why counseling has not worked in the past. For counseling to work, you both have to be committed to the result. As soon as you let your pride in and start acting as individuals, your marriage is in trouble again. As a couple, you need to consider if you want to fix these issues, or if you simply want to be right. Your answer, as well as your wife's, will tell you where the marriage is at.

You need to set up regular meetings with Terri to discuss the issues as adults. This needs to be at least once if not twice a week. This separation needs to serve a purpose and you need goals and objectives to meet. You need to identify what each of you need to do to fix this. I want you to talk and to actively listen. Then you need to follow up your talking with positive action. I have no faith in your ability to do this yourselves, so you are going to need mediation in the form of counseling to monitor you both and to make sure that progress is being made. You need to establish how you can measure your progress. If you both are not able to modify this selfish behavior, you need to evaluate at that stage if continuing your marriage is viable.



I have been married to my wife for 2 1/2 years now. She is Asian and I am European, but she is very western minded so culturally we are not that different. We were friends for many years before becoming a couple and lived together for 2 years before getting married. I am living in her home country in Asia.

My wife is very outgoing, very open and a people person. I have always been the quiet and shy person who never dared talking to a person I do not know unless introduced. Initially everything seemed to go well until one day my wife complained that I never talked when having sex and she felt like I was just using her for my own pleasure without considering her feelings. I have never been told this before and it was a major blow to my self esteem as I enjoyed the sex and also do not feel comfortable talking while having sex as I find it "silly" and it turns me off. My wife was often the one initiating sex which I embraced with open arms, but I often did it myself also. After the statement I felt very bad and completely stopped initiating sex and at the same time my wife slowly stopped also. The few times we tried were not a success and sometimes we even ended up arguing because of it. Slowly things became worse.

We had a destination wedding which turned sour because of some family problems between my wife and her sister and my wife was angry with me because she felt I did not stand up for her. I am always trying to please everyone and often end up pleasing no one. The week following the wedding we were on a short honeymoon which was a true nightmare. My wife even threatened to leave and we argued a lot.

Back home things got from bad to worse even though we did not constantly argue and also had many good days. But a main problem was communication mainly from my side as I did not know how to address the issue of sex and we have not had sex even once (completed anyway) since the day we got married 2 1/2 years ago. It sounds unreal but it's true.

A year after we moved in together my father died of cancer and 7 months later my mother took her own life, so it was a very difficult period for me. As I have always done all my life I did not talk much about it even though I was very sad for a long time and probably depressed as well. Shortly after our marriage I got laid off, but did find a new job relatively fast. However, this lasted less than 2 years and I have now been unemployed for 4 months and yes, money is starting to become an issue. My wife has her own business with 2 partners, but it is still new and her income is not even enough to pay our loans. So I worry a lot and are often finding myself being very negative about things even though I am trying not to.

During our marriage my wife has threatened to leave me several times, has hit me and are often talking down to me in a very hurting and insulting way. I am constantly asking for forgiveness for making her sad or upset for whatever reason. Even if I feel I am the one in the right I end up apologizing in the end which of course makes me feel very frustrated. But I am very selfish and my wife always think of me where as I always think of myself even though I try to do things for her/us as well. But not really things that matter much to her as they are not personal (cleaning, washing, shopping etc.).

The main problem as far as I see it is communication. I HATE talking about our problems and especially sex. I do not feel like sex even though I still find my wife very attractive and I love her very much. I always think I am communicating with her (about general things that are happening mostly, friends, work, family), but obviously she does not think that is communication. I fully understand she is frustrated to the brink of divorcing me due to the lack of physical intimacy, but I just do not know how to get started. I am scared she does not want me if I am going to try and I am not good at being turned down. It scares me!

One last problem or challenge thrown into the equation is me being a type 1 diabetic. When my blood sugar gets low I sometimes get very impatient with her or ignores her and afterward I often cannot remember things I have said or done. After happening many enough times it obviously gets to her and I hate using it as an excuse for me hurting her.

So there are many things going against us. I really, really WANT to make this marriage work and make my wife happy more than anything. But I am struggling between using all my time trying to find a job so we do not have to worry about money and spending time on surprising my wife, cook for her, take her out for a dinner or away for a weekend. Should be easy? Maybe, but I spend all my time in front of a laptop and time just disappears, days disappear and things never change for me and for us. I am VERY sure she will not stay with me much longer and there are so many obvious signs. But I know that she loves me very much, so that's a good starting point.

Am I all to blame? Need advise and fast. HELP, HELP, HELP!

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

I can see two very obvious problems in your marriage, and these are areas that you are either going to need to work on either as a couple or with a counselor.

You pointed out very clearly that you have stopped having sex, and no longer initiate intimacy with your wife. What this tells me very clearly is that your wife is feeling neglected. There are several key facets to a healthy relationship, and it is vital that you are able to meet each others needs, both individually and within the relationship. You are denying your wife intimacy at a time when she is craving it. If you are not fulfilling this role in your marriage, where do you expect her to receive this fulfillment?

This is usually where affairs happen. If you are unable to fulfill this role, your wife may be looking for this fulfillment outside the relationship. In addition to this, you are not validating her in your relationship. When you stop being intimate with your wife, you diminish her feelings of value in the marriage. Consider for a moment how your actions make her feel. You treat her like a friend, not a wife or lover.

In what other ways do you demonstrate your love to your wife? How do you make her feel attractive? How do you make her feel loved? How do you make her feel valued in your marriage?

I really believe this is the major issue underpinning all of your troubles. Your wife treats you badly because she does not feel valued.

Think back to a time when things were really great in your marriage. Is the situation you are in now what you dreamed it would be? Do you suppose the situation you are in now is her dream too?

This is not about cooking her dinner. This is not about taking her away for the weekend. This is about getting back in touch with your intimate self, reintroducing touch into your marriage, and restarting your sex life. It is scary, but without it, it seems likely that your wife is going to leave you. You need to be able to fulfill those needs. Which is scarier? Not getting it right, or not trying at all and finishing your marriage?

When is the last time you spoke to your wife about sex? I understand she likes it a certain way, but you like it a certain way too. Is there any room for compromise? Perhaps her way one night, your way the next?

I want you to take a look at *'Hot Sex'* by Tracey Cox. In it you and your partner will be able to explore your sexuality and find new ways to express intimacy. Tracey is a really great author who presents ideas and concepts in a non-threatening way.

You may also want to entertain the idea of couples counseling or sex therapy. I know you may find all of this uncomfortable, but unless you are able to approach this issue soon, your wife is going to lose patience.

You have a very real problem. This is perhaps one of the most prolific problems in modern marriages. Don't forget to fulfill each others needs, both individually and as a couple. Intimacy is crucial. It conveys value, love, and validation to your partner, as well as being fun. Don't let your ego get in the way of saving your marriage.

This is not about blame. This is about loving each other.

The second issue is communication. You already know that. I want you to consider how the two of you interact. Avoiding issues won't make them go away. In fact, it makes them worse. You need to use "I feel" statements. You need to tell her about how you feel. Tell her about how you love her. Tell her about how you want to try, and follow it up with actions. You may also need to listen. Listen to what she is telling you. Let her tell you about how she feels. Then it is time to talk together about the best way to move forward.



I am in the middle of a crisis with my husband and need any help I can get to try to sort through things. My husband and I have been married 7 years and I don't think we have ever really learned the proper way to communicate with each other. I am an open book with my feelings and he is locked up tight with his. We got married when I was 19 and he was 20, but I refuse to let the fact that we got married young be a deciding factor in the outcome of our marriage. My husband has left me 3 times now whenever there is a crisis in his life that he can't seem to deal with. The last time was 3 weeks ago. Two days before he left I asked him what was wrong because I could see that he had been pulling away from me over the last couple months and he said that he was depressed and didn't know why. We talked for awhile about our relationship and he acted like it was something we could fix. I asked him if he felt we needed marriage counseling and he told me no that we would be able to fix things on our own. I told him how I was feeling about things that had been going on in our relationship, but he really didn't let me know how he felt. Two days went by and I knew something still had not been resolved so I called him at work and told him that I was really feeling uneasy about things and that I wanted to talk to him when he got home. When he came into the house I asked him if he wanted to talk and he asked me to give him a minute so I let him take some time to think about things. When he finally came into talk to me he just kept saying I am not happy. I asked him why, but he couldn't give me a reason. I asked him over and over again if we needed to get marriage counseling and he assured me that we would be fine and could work this out on our own. We ended up in a big argument because as I was talking to him I could see him shutting down and I finally looked at him and said why does it feel like you have already left me and he didn't answer me. At that point I was so upset I said you have left haven't you and he just shock his head and said no I haven't. I told him that I would go stay at my parents for awhile if he needed time to think about things and if that was what he wanted. I was getting my stuff together to go, but I decided I didn't want this to be my decision alone because I didn't want him to think that I was abandoning him so I asked him if this was what he wanted. He just looked at me and said he didn't know. I kept insisting that he give me a yes or no answer because I didn't want to leave if he didn't want me to. He just kept saying maybe this is a good idea, but still no definitive answer. Finally after arguing about it for a couple minutes he flew off the handle and said fine I will leave and get a hotel room for the night

and he grabbed his stuff and left. Like I said this is the third time that we have gone through this and it always catches me off guard because it is like he is there one second telling me we can work it all out and then the next second he is walking out. The next morning he came by the house and I asked him if he was back home and he asked for another night to think about things so I said that's fine and left it at that. He came by that evening to spend some time with our son and took him out for a couple hours. I wrote him a note just pouring my feelings out to him about everything that we have gone through. I asked him to trust me because he has always been there for me in a time of crisis in my life and I just didn't understand why he wouldn't lean on me during a time that was difficult for him. He told me he appreciated everything that I said to him, but that he still needed the night away to think about things. The next morning he came home and said it was over that he loved me, but he wasn't in love with me anymore. He didn't give me any other reason than that. The weird thing about it was when he said those words to me I just didn't believe him because it felt like it was a lie. I don't know any other way to describe it, but I honestly to this day do not believe that he means that. Two weeks of pure torture went by where we talked and argued almost everyday. I asked him repeatedly to go get counseling with me, but he kept saying my feelings are my feelings and they won't change. I asked him if he ever was in love with me and he said yes so at that point I said why would you think that your feelings couldn't change if they obviously have at some point in our relationship. We just ended up arguing worse after that, but he said he would think about it and let me know later. I called him back a little bit later and just said I was done with all of this and that he could have the divorce if that was what he really wanted, but at that moment his tune changed and he said over and over again I told you I would think about getting counseling. I decided at that moment that I was done fighting him and that I needed to change my whole attitude for us to come to any kind of resolve. A week went by of the two of us talking like we were friends again. He would call me several times a day just to chit chat with me about the business and how work was going for him and we would not argue because I decided to let all that go. I did talk to him about marriage counseling again and this time he didn't say no or yes, but that he felt he was so screwed up in the head that he needed to get some counseling himself before he gave me an answer. Now I am waiting and I feel like I am hanging out in limbo to see if he wants to try to make this work. I love him so much, but I don't ever want to go through this again with him so I am not real sure what my next move should be. I did ask him right before we started trying to have a baby if he would ever do this to me again and he assured me he wouldn't. I told him that I was not going to have a child with someone who could walk out on me again and he promised that he wouldn't do that to me. I was so hurt because our son isn't even two yet and here he has walked out on me again. Please help.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

Your submission was very detailed, and gave me some good insights into your marriage crisis, and some ideas for ways to move forward.

My first comment is in regard to the pattern that I can see developing in your relationship, where your husband leaves when he feels the pressure is getting too much. You mentioned in your submission that this has happened 3 times, and this concerns me for a number of reasons. The first is that he is backing away from the relationship in times of crisis. This tells me clearly that he is retreating into his individuality and is shutting you out of the process when he feels he can no longer handle the pressure. The second thing that concerns me is that he is not learning anything from these instances,

or developing tools to help him deal with how he is feeling. The third point is that the behavior is becoming entrenched, and if you are going to break this behavior and ask that he be more accountable, both to himself and to the relationship in terms of his expression and processing of feelings, then you have some hard work to do.

Coming back to the first point, when he retreats into his individuality in times of crisis, it's not personal. Please don't think it's about you. He is retreating into a behavior that is familiar to him, perhaps one that he has carried since childhood, and retreating and walking away, to him, is a coping mechanism. What do we do about this? The first thing we need to do is draw his attention to it and ask that he talk through ways to deal with it with a counselor. How has retreating helped him in the past? Does ignoring the problem make it go away? How can you best support him and let him know that he is supported in times of crisis? Your husband is being called to learn from this crisis, and his lesson to learn here is in finding ways to face the crisis as a couple, not as individuals. From the day you married, you as a couple are a single entity. This means your problems are his problems, and vice versa. The important thing to tell him here is that you love him and support him, even if he doesn't feel he can participate and share with you.

Second point here is that he is clearly not learning anything from the last 3 times he walked out, and that should tell him that changes need to be made. If walking out didn't help previously, has he considered trying different courses of action? Sometimes doing the opposite to what your instincts tell you can bring some interesting results. What does he need to try? Resist the temptation to run. Talk about it instead of bottling it up. Find something about the situation that he can laugh about.

Third point is that the behaviors are becoming entrenched. I want you to consider your reactions to him when he is in crisis. Instead of pressuring him to communicate with you, back off a bit. Ask him to talk to a friend, a family member, a pastor, or someone he looks up to. It doesn't have to be you. What lifestyle changes can he make to release the stress. Does he need to change jobs? Do you need to change towns, try something more relaxed, more lifestyle-focused rather than income-focused? When is the last time you went on a holiday together? When is the last time you went away on your own, as a couple, for a night or a weekend? I encourage clients to make a commitment to go away once every 2 months, even if it's only for a night. Find ways to enjoy what is around you, and create an opportunity to focus on positive things instead of work and family.

You also mentioned that your partner feels depressed, which brings me to my next point. While I understand that your intentions are great, writing notes where you are pouring out your feelings may be part of what is contributing to your husband's distress. In the act of acknowledging everything you have been through, and how he has helped you through difficult times in your life, you are placing further pressure on him. In fact, your outpourings may be making him feel emotionally responsible for the state of the relationship. It's important that he is able to feel as little pressure as possible, and from what you have written, when you backed off a little his attitude seemed to have changed.

If you need an emotional outlet at this stage, you need to find someone else to fulfill that role. He clearly can't handle the hardship and responsibility of being responsible for your happiness or emotional wellbeing, and if you are able to purge your emotions with a counselor or role model then I would encourage you to do so. That way when you are around your husband you can focus on being the strongest and most positive person you can be. Focus less on being his wife, and more on being his friend. Actively find positive things to talk about that don't mention the relationship, his depression, or

the stress he is under. Book a holiday or a short break. Find things to do together that cause you both to laugh and enjoy each other's company again. Start dating each other.

Regarding the promise he made you before your son was born, it's important not to be angry about it. He made a promise to you that was unfair and unrealistic. He can't promise something that he has no control over, especially considering his depression and his inability to learn anything from his past.

The challenge for both of you is in examining the patterns of your past. Make an active effort to react differently, do the opposite to what you have done previously, and to challenge each other to find positive new ways of communicating so that the entrenched behaviors of the last few years can be broken.

Be friends with each other before you can be lovers.



Commitment And Contribution



I ordered your book but still have some questions. Nothing covered long time marriages, 43 years. My husband cheated and said he is sorry. Do I throw it all away or keep it together??

MY REPLY:

Hi,

Thanks for your email.

I can understand your concern here regarding long term marriages, but in all honesty, you need to make the same amount of effort after 40 years as you would do after 15. A marriage is an ongoing process, and you should always be looking at ways to improve. After 43 years of course, it is easy to fall into routines, but that doesn't mean you have to stop trying.

Chances are you have had some really good times as a couple over the last 43 years. Are you prepared to let it all go after one bad thing? You might think this is an easy thing for me to say, but you need to put the problem in perspective. Is your marriage worth the effort? Are you prepared to do what it takes to keep your husband and rebuild your shattered trust and love?

Which is greater, your desire to be self-righteous and be a victim, or your desire to forgive him, grow as a couple and remain married?

I can't answer that question for you, but you need to consider the implications of your actions from here. Walking away from 43 years of marriage is going to change your life. There must be some very good reasons that you have remained married so long, and it is time to look at those reasons. Your husband says he is sorry. That is a good start. The communication exercises in *Save My Marriage*, and Chapter 5 of *Couples in Crisis* are good places to start.

Nobody said it would be easy, but you need to channel and process the many feelings you are having, and begin the healing process. This is as much for your benefit as it is for your marriage. 43 years is a good reason to try your best to keep it together. One day at a time.

Good luck. My thoughts are with you. Email me if you have any further questions.



Hi.

I bought your course.

I'm not sure if this email belongs here, but I thought I would try. The problem I am having is that my wife doesn't want to consider reconciliation. She says the relationship isn't worth it. We work together so we see each other all the time. Each time it just creates pain for me. My mother died within 4 months of our marriage and I shut down emotionally at that point. Each time my wife would reach out to me, the defensive mechanism I created would begin and each time she was hurt.

Eventually she started developing barrier towards me so she wouldn't get hurt. Now my inhibitions are gone, but she has so much resentment and pain from dealing with me for four years. I just want to know how she can begin to love me again. I've done everything in your course and it has gotten me nowhere. If she just gives me the chance, I can show her I'm not the same person that hurt her for so long.

MY REPLY:

Hi there,

Thanks for your email. Emotions play a very important factor within relationships, and from what you have written, your emotional shutdown after your mother's death has caused you and your marriage much pain. People's reaction to death can vary from person to person, and it would have been helpful at the time if you had received counseling. Your particular reaction to your mother's death pushed your spouse away, and stopped your partner from fulfilling her supportive and nurturing role within your relationship at a time that you should have needed it. What made you push your partner away, and why do you feel this defense mechanism was maintained for 4 years?

4 years is a very long time to maintain this emotional barrier, and it is this length of time that has divided your relationship and strengthened your wife's resolve. You were grieving for your mother. At the same time, your wife was grieving for her relationship.

Your wife's resentment and pain are quite justified, and at this stage you need to be patient. Your self-indulgence in allowing yourself to grieve in this way at the cost of your relationship for 4 years is going to take a very long time to forgive, and may be beyond your wife's limits. Have you allowed her the opportunity to express her years of resentment and pain to you, so that you can understand how she has felt throughout this process? It is very important that she has this opportunity, so that her feelings are heard and so that she can process her emotions and put them behind her. This can be done either alone as a couple, or written in a letter, or in a conference with a mediator or counselor.

Your wife won't give you a chance because she doesn't trust you. You need to start loving your wife again. Take a look at chapter 7 in Book 2, "Love is a doing word" for ideas on how to demonstrate your love for your wife with small gestures.

Have you been to counseling, either for your grief or for your marriage? I would recommend you do both. Your grief counseling would be a good indication to your wife that you are taking this seriously, and the marital counseling would help you discuss what went wrong in your relationship and why it happened.

You will come to the realization that you cannot control how your wife reacts, but you can control how you react as a person and how positive you can be throughout this. The key here is in rebuilding her trust, and this can be done through small gestures, letting her express her feelings that have built up over time, and through counseling, both for your grief and for your relationship.

Good luck.



I ordered your ebook "Save My Marriage Today". Please give me some feedback. My husband left me after a year and a half of marriage. I have known him for almost 16 years and he broke up twice with me before marriage. I am now 35 yrs old. I met him when we were 18 yrs old, after a year of dating we broke up because I moved. I was only 19 Or 20 years old when I got married to another man. It was an arranged marriage. I tried to make it work for 5 years but he was a party animal and immature. I was really glad to be out of that relationship. That marriage ended up in divorce, and I have no regrets about it. After 5 years of being in an arranged marriage and ending it in divorce, I contacted my ex boyfriend that I had met when I was 18. He wanted to date me again. We were in love and immediately thought we were meant to be (this was in 1995 when my first marriage ended in divorce). We were together for 8 years and always new we would get married. During these years he was in and out of jobs so I was there for him financially and emotionally when not even his family was there for him nor his friends. I helped him out so very much, but during those years he had lied to me about many things. He told me he had inherited money which was in a trust fund and he told me his father owned a lot of property. I eventually found out he had lied to me about all this so that I wouldn't leave him or maybe he thought he could continue to use me financially. I don't know why he lied (It maybe a problem of his that needs to be fixed through counseling). However, I told him that I loved him whether he had money or not. Then in 2003 we talked about getting married but then suddenly he stopped calling me and avoiding my phone calls, he had shut me out completely. I was left confused and heartbroken as to why he did that. I went to him and asked him. His response was "I can never be a good husband, please leave me alone, I don't ever want to see you again". He also said "I don't deserve you" I told him that I loved him and that we will work things out. So we got back together and 9 months later got married. Again I paid for the whole wedding because he did not have a job. As soon as we got married, I pressured him to get a job so that we could qualify for the mortgage on a townhouse that we had made a deal on. He got a job just in time and we qualified for the mortgage. Six months later he quit his job and told me he got fired. I suddenly had a financial burden on me. I was stuck making all the mortgage payments bills and everything else. I had a line of credit and a visa and a loan, all of which were under my name. I got further and further into debt while he was off work for nearly 6 months and had told me that he was taking classes to become a real estate agent. I gave him money to complete his course. He didn't even do the course nor do I know where the money went. He finally got a job in retail where his friend worked. He had told me that he would help me out financially when he started to work, but that too was a lie. He rarely helped with the household finances when he started to work. I was getting further and further into debt. We finally sold the house. We were looking for a place to rent but one day when I came home from work, he had already moved out on his own. I was devastated. I was heartbroken. I thought despite of the entire financial burden on me that we could make our marriage work once the house was sold and the profit from the house would clear all debt and we could concentrate on our marriage and be happy. He wanted \$25,000 of the profit from the house and told me that he was

entitled to it. I hired a lawyer and he was angry with me for hiring a lawyer because that would have meant that all the money would have went towards the debt and he would have nothing. He said that I was trying to control him or bring him back to me by not giving him the money. He told me he would be penniless but would never return to me no matter what. I wanted him back because I loved him despite all the things that went wrong. I knew that if I did not give him the money he would not be able to make it living on his own. He told me that I was always trying to control him in our marriage (he felt that I controlled whether or not he could see his friends and whether or not he could see his family. During our marriage he never made me feel important, I felt we were not a team, I felt when I needed him he wasn't there for me even though I was always there for him. I Love him so much and I always felt he never loved me the way I loved him therefore I got angry and jealous when he would spend time with his family and friend, I felt hurt and neglected, I wanted him so much and wished that he would want me like that too. He would lock his car on me, hide his wallet from me, hide his mail from me, hide his cell phone. He felt controlled and I felt unloved. After we separated I begged him on the phone to come back but he was angry with me. I didn't want him to feel controlled so I gave him \$15,000 of the profit from the house. He has agreed that we should both go for one to one counseling and then we should go for couples counseling. He admits that he has many issues of his own to resolve during counseling (He feels like he never succeeded in life in regards to his career and also he feels that his parents did not fulfill their duty as parents). I believe he has a lot of issues that stem from his family background and upbringing that has contributed to all our marital problems. I still don't know where he moved to and we are still separated. I love him with all my heart and I want our marriage to work, he says he wants our marriage to work too. Should I believe him? He has lied to me before. But if he really did not want it to work, he could shut me out right now, because he has nothing to lose (he got his money). He keeps telling me things are going to work out, don't worry, I miss you too, I know it's difficult to be apart.(but then why is he making us both suffer if he feels this way). Why doesn't he tell me where he lives, why doesn't he want to move in together and go for counseling? Why does he want to live separately and go for counseling? It's already been a tough one month for me. At times I'm angry with him for hurting me and I want him to hurt too, sometimes I'm sad, sometimes I cry. I love him and I miss him. I have been doing a lot of reading about relationships (I'm sincerely willing to change what I need to change to make our marriage work and he says he is too). He is a guy and maybe he is afraid and needs more than a month but in the mean time I'm hurting maybe he is too and he is not showing it.

We have been on one very lovely date since we have been separated. We went to dinner and a movie (The chemistry is still there between us), and we did not have sex on this date, we decided that we would wait until we were together for good. He told me he misses me and loves me but then why is he taking his time. We both continue to go for counseling separately at this time. I'm scared what if in the end he doesn't want me but he is saying not to worry everything will workout, he calls me to see how I'm doing. Is he afraid too? Please help me clarify things.

MY REPLY:

Hi there,

While I think you may be making progress as a couple in going to counseling separately, you really need to be going to joint sessions so that you can get to the bottom of your husband's habit of dumping you right in it and his constant lying to you.

From what you have written, your husband has some serious issues with responsibility, particularly in the way he participates in the marriage and takes responsibility for his financial contribution. Thus far he has lied to you about his inheritance, spent long periods of time unemployed, lied to you about attending courses, moved out without telling you, and then demanded a share of the profit from the house sale, despite the considerable debt you have accumulated as a couple while he was unemployed.

This man needs to grow up. Before you are ready to offer him another chance, he needs to understand what it means to be in a relationship, and what it involves. He has destroyed your trust with his selfish behavior, and it is appropriate at this stage for him to prove to you that he is worthy of your trust again and able to make up for all of the ways he has hurt you in the past.

If you decide to make another go of it, you need to explore the idea of self-sufficiency for a while, both financially and practically. Your husband needs to understand what it is to be self-sufficient financially. This also extends to his emotional maturity, and his ability to both be emotionally responsible for himself, but to also gift love and emotion to others, particularly you.

He needs to get a job and sort himself out. You are not strong enough financially and emotionally to support him again, nor should you be expected to. He needs to know this, and face up to his responsibilities both as a husband and as a man. You need to sit down with a counselor and make some rules and guidelines if your marriage is going to work. If he is going to come back he has to have a job and be able to support himself, and demonstrate that he is capable of holding down a job and stop blaming others for his life choices. I know this sounds harsh, but it is indicative of the way he has used you throughout your marriage.

He is not trustworthy with your love, and most certainly not with your money. Protect yourself this time, so that you are able to give him another chance, but this time without him walking all over you like he has done so often in the past.

Have you thought about a prenuptial agreement, or putting your personal assets into a family trust for safekeeping? If your husband is to come back, he needs to understand that his contributions need to be equal.

I recall a saying, "There are no passengers in life, only crew." Don't let your husband be a passenger in your marriage this time round.

Good luck, and look after yourself,

Andrew



I've tried everything in your package and some....

My eyes have finally been opened and I realize that my husband is plain and simple egotistical and greedy beyond belief.

I was looking at so many other things, including myself, and just could not believe the above until now.

The short and to the point story is, I've always trusted God to deliver everything that a normal heart could desire. We were blessed with a nice home in a nice neighborhood, fully paid off. Fairly nice vehicles fully paid off. We have a son in College with a 75% Academic Scholarship....all this and some.

I'm a retiree (forced retirement) with full benefits...cannot collect benefits until age-eligible. My husband has been putting pressure on me to go back to work a full-time job, good paying job, so he can look at much more money in the bank and have tried every trick in the book to get me to do so. He makes a six figure income and has cut me off financially and is putting pressure on me to assume 50 percent of the household maintenance and in the process have used every childish trick in the book to accomplish this or otherwise satisfy his ego.

How do I tackle this one for a solution? I would prefer not to think or say as Job's Wife "curse God and die, or in my case satisfy my husband's ego, and displease God....we plain and simple do not need the extra income and I need the time to work for the Lord My Savior.

By the way, I think he resents the fact that I'm serving God. Also, understand, he is very bitter about all this and more...bitter to the point I see hatred in his eyes. I also believe that there are some outside influence, i.e. jealous families and friends.

I would love to entertain your comments, concerns, and suggestions.

Thank you.

MY REPLY:

I noticed I have heard from you before, so I am troubled to hear that there has been no progress. If you are looking for a resolution to your marital problems, you need to consider that the commitment to change needs to come from both you and your husband. While I can accept that there are faults on your husband's side, the attitude you have towards your husband is also of concern.

You believe your husband is egotistical and greedy beyond belief. You also, in your own words, been living in a loveless marriage for over a year and indicated that you are waiting for a change. This tells me that you are placing the impetus for change on your husband.

If you believe this, then little is going to change in your marriage in the near future. In fact, there is a good chance that things will get worse. When our marriages are in crisis, we are called to make changes in the relationship. A marriage problem acknowledges that there is an issue in the relationship, and that you are both called to assess how you can both best deal with this issue. Ignoring the need for change and expecting your husband to make all the necessary changes is not going to make the problems go away as much as it is going to create a new set of problems.

Your faith in God is to be commended, however you also need to have faith in your own ability to guide this change process and help heal the issues that are present in your relationship.

From what you have written, you have retired while your husband works full-time. Perhaps a compromise would be to work part-time. There are ways to serve God while working part time and you need to balance your devotion to God with your commitment to the sanctity of your marital union. I understand you have a duty to serve God, but you also have a duty as a wife and mother and you are being invited here to participate in a solution to these troubles.

The issue here is that you and your husband are approaching this issue from different ends of the spectrum, and a solution is going to need to involve some compromise from the both of you. It sounds as though you are both very stubborn people. Have you considered the pressure your husband is under to work full-time and maintain the lifestyle that you are both used to? Do you feel that he may resent the unequal contributions that you make to the relationship in comparison to the long hours he works?

A marriage is a partnership, and it seems that from your husband's point of view the contributions are unequal. This may not be a money or an ego issue. This may be an issue of your husband not feeling valued in the relationship and not feeling part of a team. Sometimes you can gain better perspective by walking a mile in someone else's shoes. Have you considered how you would feel if you had to work full time in a stressful job while your husband retired?

My motivation here is not to criticize your choice of retiring and serving God, but to see things from an alternate perspective.

Solution is about compromise, and about swallowing some of your pride and doing what is in the best interests of the relationship, not just the best interests of you. Until you are able to sit down and explore ways of negotiating a compromise, the peace you are seeking will continue to elude you.

HER REPLY:

I did everything you said in your reply short of getting down on my knees and beg.

I have a part-time job, which we really do not need.

I contribute, maybe not 50%, but is it not the responsibility of a man to take care of his household. This is how I understand it from the bible. I've have helped him for 20 years so that life can be easy now. What is the problem?

I know you do not have all the answers...I still think the man is egotistical and greedy because not many people these days have a debt-free life.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for the email.

You did not make it clear that you were working part-time in any of your previous correspondence, so my advice is limited by the information you offer in your emails.

What do you feel your husband's motivation is to have you work more? What is his perspective on the issue?

It sounds as though you both have different perspectives on the sustainability of your lifestyle. You see your situation now as being luckier than most, and while I would agree with this, do you feel you would be able to sustain this lifestyle were your husband to retire? Do you think perhaps he may be motivated to have a more comfortable lifestyle in your future by working harder now?

You are devoted to serving God. Your husband may be devoted to accumulating as much as possible for the comfort of your retirement. This is a judgment call, and neither of you are correct or incorrect in your interpretation. But if you are steadfast in your belief that your husband is egotistical and greedy, then this mindset is working against any efforts you make to save your marriage.

Consider how your beliefs about your husband are influencing the way you approach the issues in your marriage. You cannot directly control the actions of your partner, but you can control your reactions to him. Negative beliefs about him are counter-productive to the resolution process.

I understand that you take your understandings about men taking care of the household from the bible, but bible principles and how they are applied to everyday life are selective at best. There are a number of guidelines regarding the wearing of synthetic fabrics, keeping slaves, and burning sacrifices that people choose to ignore because they no longer reflect the society in which we live. People try to live their lives by the guiding principles that the bible offers, and most societies support this, but it pays not to take all of the principles too literally, especially when it comes to justifying why your husband needs to take greater care. The Bible is a guiding document, and its interpretation, not its literal translation, is what keeps it relevant in modern life.

Discuss with your husband the reasons he feels it is important that you both work and accumulate money. Do you understand his motivations? Do you understand his masculine desires to succeed and achieve? You haven't explained his motivations in any of your previous emails.

You both sound like strong souls, and both of you are very determined. I would encourage you to go to couples counseling if you can't listen to each other, and see if mediation gets you any results. At this stage an outside influence may be necessary to mediate this issue and offer you both some insights.



We are married for 16 years. We have three children age 10, 8 and 4. Yet my wife threatens with divorce about twice a week for the past four years. I don't believe in divorce as a solution to solving feelings of discontent in marriage.

These threats prevent us from solving any underlying issues, because when the emotions start there is always the answer: "Perhaps it is better that we divorce", end discussion. No real issues are attacked, because a divorce seems the solution to all our problems.

These conflicts started after a troubled year in which our dog died, my wife's mothers divorced again and her brother was divorced by his wife and my wife got her college degree.

The children are doing well in school and are a great blessing. My wife had mental problems within the first year after our marriage, in which she was diagnosed: borderline personality. She recovered with great effort on her side. Now I am seen as the cause of her bad feelings.

It is difficult to get any closer to a wife, who could divorce my any time. I respond with withdrawal and keeping distance to avoid any further conflict. We sleep in two separate bedrooms.

What should I do? I don't accept the way she controls the outcome of many conflicts by threatening with divorce. Accept from keeping distance, I don't know how to respond to these threats. I try not to act or react to them to prevent further escalation. Have you any suggestions?

Thanking you in anticipation

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

Communication is an integral part of a healthy relationship, so your wife's constant threat of divorce twice a week for four years is effectively destroying any hope of the two of you being able to effectively communicate about any issues. In fact, it is quite unfair, and I feel she is using this threat as a weapon when she doesn't want to talk about it anymore.

This is not appropriate. In this circumstance, your withdrawal has caused your wife to take advantage of this threat. My advice to you next time she does this to you is to agree completely, and indicate that if she refuses to communicate with you on issues that are important, then it would be more appropriate if she followed through on her threat and left the house.

You are living in fear of a divorce, but because of this fear, your marriage is suffering anyway. It is time to face your fears and her threats and put an end to it. The threats have to stop. If she doesn't want to fix your marital problems, your marriage is as good as over anyway. I strongly feel that she will not follow through with a divorce. I have seen lots of couples do the same thing, and confronting her threats will cause her to buckle. The people who threaten it the most are usually the ones most scared of doing it.

Once you are past the threats, it would be a good time to work through my chapters on communication, and doing some of the exercises. There is heaps of material in our books that are going to be of enormous benefit to you.

Kind regards,

Andrew

THEIR REPLY:

Many thank for your quick reply.

About four years ago my wife wanted a trial divorce, in which she was free to leave (and take the children), and live at another house and return whenever she was pleased to do so.

I opposed and said: when she left it was the same as a divorce and a judge should decide where the children would stay. I am the primary caretaker of the children.

She backed off and stayed, but claimed this to be involuntary. She stayed only for the benefit of the children and was no longer interested in any emotional bond with me any longer.

'My advice to you next time she does this to you is to agree completely', you say.

If there would be no children involved, I would follow your advice.

But the law in Holland is in favor of the mother, and probably would allow my wife and children to stay in the house and force me to move out of the house (I inherited this house from my father). Even if I am the one who takes care of the children and the household most of the time.

I don't think it is fair to the children to send their mother away because she threatens to divorce their father, me. I think the only option I have is to withdraw emotionally and not to respond to unrealistic threats.

'You are living in fear of a divorce, but because of this fear, your marriage is suffering anyway.

It is time to face your fears and her threats and put an end to it. The threats have to stop.

If she doesn't want to fix your marital problems, your marriage is as good as over anyway.', you say.

I agree with you. This is also what my wife tells me: she says the marriage is over. She says, she only stays so that the children have a father and mother, she does not stay for the relationship with me. Because the marriage is over there is no need anymore from her point of view to full-fill any of my emotional needs, for a hug or a cuddle. The living together (she says) is for practical reasons, so that we both can share in taking care of the children.

Our marriage is only still existing on the outside (my wife says), on the inside she has already divorced me. Since she (one sided) has made these decisions, there is less conflict and more and more distance. It is 'cold' in the house, I hate coming home if I think about what my wife might say each night.

How can I open a case that is already closed down (one-sided)?

I love our children and I accept my wife, but I live in fear of a divorce all the time. She knows that and uses it to pressure me day by day. I agree with you, I want these threats to stop.

Is there no other way than to co-operate with a divorce?

MY REPLY:

Hi,

Thanks for your clarification on those points. My advice to you at this stage would be to seek legal advice so that you understand what your rights are and what you are entitled to. At the moment I feel your wife is capitalizing on your fear of the consequences, and is making life for you very difficult. Knowledge is power, and the sooner you are more aware of your rights under Dutch law, the better you will feel.

When you speak of dreading coming home every night because of the "cold" atmosphere, I recognize that this is not a situation that you can or should sustain for an extended period of time. I understand your commitment to your children and your love for them, but when you speak of what is fair for your children, you must consider what sort of atmosphere it is for the children in your home. Children are far more perceptive than you might imagine, and in many circumstances are better off in a stable environment with only one parent as opposed to an unstable environment with two parents still living together.

Your wife sounds like a very manipulative person. She sounds as though she has a lot of residual anger towards you, and it would be useful for you to understand where this anger is coming from.

In the meantime, see a lawyer and establish what your rights are. I think you will find this very empowering. Your next step is to confront her threats and your fears, or simply stop engaging in conversation with her altogether.



I would very much appreciate your advice on my situation. I have been married for 10 years and have a son of 5.

For the last couple of years my husband's work has become very demanding and stressful to the point where taking time off has been limited. Last year we shared as a family one week together. We never went out - maybe a couple of times a year. I have constantly asked and admit moaned to take more time off not just for the sake of the marriage but for his own health (my husband is very English and believes only weak people get stressed!). I have had the feeling that things have not been right between us for nearly a year - little things that I could not put my finger on - lack of affection (both ways) lack of real communication, taking each other for granted, I myself work part-time and know that between my job and raising my son it has left little time left for my marriage.

I highlighted to my husband a month ago all my concerns - I appreciate he wants the money to give us a good standard of living but to what cost? In temper I took my wedding off as a gesture saying that this is not a marriage and if he wants to act as a husband he can give me the ring back and we can start to rebuild. I know this is a stupid thing to do - I did this to gain a reaction - to give him a chance to

express that he still loved me (I have told him this). After several weeks of trying to communicate and discuss why we are at this stage in our marriage - (my husband does not find it easy to talk) he finally admitted that he was not sure of his feelings for me and spoke about moving out.

I was and am totally devastated - I was not sure of my feelings until this happen but I really want this marriage to work and still love my husband. During these weeks I have realize that a lot of my distance towards my husband was because he did not want anymore children and I resented him for this - I have explain this to him, I also felt unloved because he would not take time off from work. I know I can be bossy at times and he has told me that he felt lonely and unwanted too, I was so upset to think he just did not highlight and talk to me about these things before the rot set in.

I am now in limbo. My husband says he loves me one moment then says things like he has to make decisions. He is not sure what he thinks - I know I got to give him space, its so hard when he is being nice and polite and I feel that he does not love me anymore. Maybe I am too black and white I need to know where I stand - I have asked my husband what he wants, his needs, but he is never clear. He says one thing then another. I find it hard to physically function in this nowhere land we are in. We don't argue now (I am trying so hard not to lose my temper so often. My husband never seems to get angry) - conversation just brings up the same things - with his lack of communication and my frustration I don't see a lot of conclusion.

I have read your book and I know I must start looking after myself better - and if there is any chance for us I have to stop being needy - I have to make things more pleasant but I feel on my own with this. I know I can't make someone do what I want.

How do you deal with a person who does not like conflict and discussion? I feel when I want to talk it starts to get too much for him - but I thought the right way forward was to keep talking, but it leaves me feeling more hurt with his constant lack of direction. I have asked him to take time off from work - he has taken 3 days - what do you suggest I do now? I feel he may be depressed or stressed from work but he won't hear of this. He is also not keen on seeking professional help. Would a trial separation help? I don't want this route especially for the sake of our little boy but I am at a loss.

MY REPLY:

The first thing that I will tell you is that you are not alone in this situation. A number of couples face the same types of problems once they have children and jobs to contend with. There can be so much energy invested in raising children and working jobs to give your children the best opportunities, often opportunities that parents never had, that there can sometimes be little energy for each other or the relationship.

You need to sit down and talk as a couple about what your priorities are and where you want to be in the next twelve months, two years, and again in the next five years. Your husband works long hours because he believes that this is what he needs to do to provide you all with the life he wants you to have. Perhaps throwing your ring at him was not the right way to express your feelings or frustration, but I understand your intentions were in the right place. The expression however may need some more consideration.

I want you to develop your skills in talking about your feelings. I want you to consider your feelings about what is happening to you and what an appropriate reaction or expression is, but also your priorities as an individual and a couple.

When you first got together, before you had children, your primary motivator may have been income and accumulating as much money and resources as possible in order to set yourselves up in life. It's not uncommon for those priorities to change when children are born, as a balance between work and spending time together as a family is often desired. I feel this is where the miscommunication is at. Your husband still believes working hard and having lots of money is a priority, and this is partly true, but you would prefer him home more often to participate in the family.

You need to communicate to your husband that there is a shift in the needs and priorities of the family. He is a great husband, father and provider, but as you are all growing as a family your needs and wants have changed. A change doesn't have to be a bad thing, in fact, it's quite normal.

Instead of the primary focus being on money, it's also shared with time. Time is a really precious commodity, and the family needs time just as much as it needs money in order to function in a healthy and successful way. It's important that he is able to understand this without undermining his contribution. Tell him that you miss him and wish you could spend more quality time with him. In recognition of this, you can discuss ways that you can make financial cutbacks to your budget to allow for your husband's reduction in working hours.

Your first function is to spend some time rebuilding and nurturing the two of you as a couple. Start by taking some time off and going away together, just as a couple, for the weekend. Arrange for someone to look after your son. Spend this time together over the weekend as a couple, doing things that you both enjoyed before you both got so caught up in your everyday lives. Reconnect as a couple. This will tell you if you have something to rebuild when you come back from your holiday.

I don't feel a trial separation is going to help fix the issues in your relationship. In fact, moving out and living as individuals is most likely going to further divide you rather than bring you closer together.

You have every opportunity to save this marriage, but the key to your success is in communicating openly and honestly with your husband, rather than acting out of frustration. There are a number of exercises available in the course that will help you with expressing and releasing stress, and in approaching your husband in a calm, focused, and loving manner.

He is doing what he feels is right, so it's important to remember that. Both of you are right on this one, but your priorities are different. That's where the negotiation begins.



Ok, I'm 27 and am currently married and my wife is 23. We have 1 beautiful baby girl who is 19 months. My wife and I have been together for 6 years and married for a year and half. She and the baby left the house on July 27th to go stay with her mom and step dad saying that she needs some time to think about what she wants. Later that week she said that she wanted to separate. Since then I've been depressed and hurt as well as the typical not eating and stuff like that, as we bought a house out in the middle of nowhere in Virginia about 2 years ago my mom and dad are in Tennessee. I'm 45 minutes away from her mom and step dad's house.

Now looking back at events of that day, it was a Saturday, i work retail so I usually have to work the weekends, and she works a more traditional 9-5 job. I had to work at 12 pm and she was getting up and taking the baby up to her cousin's house (who also has a baby) for the day to go to the pool and stuff like that. Now after she left, i got up and our sex life has been dwelling in the past few weeks, i mean we had sex but not that much of it. So i hopped on the internet and looked at some porn (nothing disturbing just regular stuff) Well before i knew it, it was time for me to go to work, so i got up and got dressed and left. Now before my wife had left she asked me to clean the dishes in the sink from the night before. So i filled the dishwasher and left a note that i would clean up the rest when i got home. So then i went to work. She called me throughout the day and told me that the kids were having a great time in the pool and everything was great. She called me on the way home and even then everything was normal. Well when she got home she saw my note and then went to the computer and checked on the website history and saw the porn sites. So she called me and was very angry about that. So when I got home she told me that she was going to stay with her mom for a few days. I apologized for the dishes and the porn, but figured that since we used to have a porn video in the house that we used to watch together at times, that this shouldn't have been a big thing. I mean I'm by no means a porn addict or anything i mean I've looked at it on the internet maybe 10 times in the past 6 years.

Well anyway so she left, which hurt me. But I figured that in a few days she would cool off and come back, I mean she has friends who are married and the husbands are cheating on their wives and they still want to work it out. When she asked for the separation I was floored. I mean yes we had arguments about cleaning and laundry (neither of us likes to do). We both had our views, hers were that she took care of everything but at the same time she would go somewhere every weekend, either to her mom's house or dad's house or cousin's house. I do not think she was having an affair or anything like that, she's just not like that at all, she's very faithful about that, nor have I ever had an affair. And her view was that I did nothing at all, which I'm not going to lie to you, I'm not a work horse when it comes to cleaning and stuff like that, but I did do some it. Usually if I'm working late i come home around 11pm and she's still up and i haven't seen her all day so i would stay with her to try to spend some time together, then we would go to sleep.

We went to a counselor before, for a few sessions for pretty much the same reasons but we stopped going, see her real dad is clinically depressed and is on some medication for it. The counselor thought that my wife should get tested to see if she has a chemical imbalanced, she said that there is nothing wrong with her because she's not depressed at work just when she comes home, but at the same time she hated where she worked because of how they treated the employees, so much so that she just started a new job this week. And she hated where our baby was at daycare, so she changed where the baby is staying now, and at the same time walked out on our marriage. I'm not a professional or anything but to me, you can walk away from a job, and a daycare, but a marriage??? I mean I could understand if I was beating her or something or even yelling at her, I don't even raise my voice to people.

Well since then we went through a stage of texting each other back and forth, I would text her that I missed her and our daughter, she would text back they miss me too. We even went out to dinner one night as a family and had a pretty good time, I mean it was just pizza but anything was better than nothing. And then two days ago my wife and I had lunch together, we didn't talk about us, just about how her job was going and how my job was going. I find myself making the mistakes of looking desperate to her I know I am, but I don't want to loose our family.

Last night we were IMing back and forth, she bought a separation agreement online and wants us to fill it out as soon as possible. Today my brother called me and told me that he found her profile on Match.com (no picture) but it is definitely her. I bought the e-book and have tried some things, but how do I get her to be willing to try to save what we once had?? She is very strong about wanting to follow her heart. HOW DO I GET HER HEART TO COME THIS WAY??? You guys are my last hope here; I don't want to lose my family to this.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

I want to start by telling you I don't think it is about the porn specifically. If you go into your marriage problem believing the porn is the main issue here, I think you might be missing the point. What I believe the issue here may be, is your wife's need to feel valued in the relationship.

All of the things you have listed in your submission, cleaning, doing dishes, her feelings about coming home from work, all of these things point towards her needing to feel valued in your relationship, especially considering her heavy workload in maintaining her job, keeping the house clean and raising your child.

Having a baby will have added to her workload immeasurably, and it sounds as though she is using this separation to put a cry out for help, in a bid to get the attention she feels she is missing out on.

If you are committed to saving your marriage, you need to focus on your communication strategies with your wife and keep your communication as positive and frequent as possible. If every interaction, either by telephone or in person is a positive one, this will make it more difficult for your wife to make a determined step to end the marriage.

A separation agreement is not going to give her the attention or peace of mind she craves. She needs to know that she is valued, both as a woman and as your wife. In maintaining regular contact with her, you need to try and encourage her to go to couples counseling so she can create an environment in which she feels encouraged to share her true feelings about her place in the relationship and where she feels positive changes can be made.

Even if you suspect that she has a profile online, do not attempt to confront her about this. This is not a time in your relationship to apportion guilt or blame upon each other. Both of you have contributed to the lack of effective communication in your relationship, and while it may feel tempting to use your suspicion of her profile as a weapon or bargaining tool, you need to consider how this is going to bring you closer together. At this stage I would not recommend mentioning it at all.

The separation agreement is not going to offer your wife a resolution. Until you are able to sit down as a couple and discuss the issues, signing any agreement would not be recommended.

I would also encourage you to take a look at my chapter in Book 2 on "Love is a Doing Word" for small ways to demonstrate your love and support. Even the smallest things can spark a change in your relationship.

HIS REPLY:

I agree, I believe that I do need to show her more value as a woman and a wife. I mean she is incredible mother. We went to counseling before, but they really didn't help the situation they were more trying to figure out why we felt the way we did. I am currently trying to make every contact with her a positive one, with out arguing about the past or anything. She's the one that wants to sign the separation agreement, I told her that I would do anything to work on things, even offered to set up another counseling session, she told me that there is nothing for us to work on. So how do I convince her to go to marriage counseling if she doesn't even want to work on things?

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

Persuading her to go to counseling can be a difficult thing, and she needs to understand that she needs to be fully committed to the counseling if you are going to get any benefit from it. You only get as much out of counseling as you are prepared to put in. Perhaps her previous counseling sessions didn't benefit as much because of her reluctance to get involved in the process. Counselors don't do all the work. For counseling to be effective, you all have to be involved, and in this respect the counselor is a facilitator rather than the one doing all the work.

You may want to talk to someone she confides in, or someone she trusts, perhaps a good friend or even a parent or family member. If a friend or trusted person is able to understand why you want her to go to counseling, they may be able to talk to her about it and present the information in a more neutral way that doesn't take sides with either party.

She tells you there is nothing to work on, yet she seems determined to end the relationship without an explanation. This tells me she is not sure what the reason is, and doesn't understand what she really wants. A divorce is not going to offer her the answers she wants.

She also needs to understand the very practical implications of divorce and what it involves. Divorces are not as simple as people imagine them to be, and the division of assets, custody of children, childcare, changes in lifestyle, and rediscovering life as a single person are all things that will impact on your life for many years to come. Divorce is not an easy solution to marriage problems, and in many cases it creates lots of new problems. It might be helpful for a friend or trusted person to discuss the practicalities of this with your wife in a way that gives her the facts without judging her either way. For her to be exploring separation agreements and legal documents, she needs to fully understand the lasting implications this decision is going to have on her and her child. To make all of this her only option, she needs to be able to justify it with reasoning.

You may want to try a different counselor to the one you have used before. But start by seeing if you can get a friend or someone close to her to present the facts, pure and simple, and to understand what is motivating her to make this big decision.

Keep up with making each interaction as positive as possible.



I really could use some friendly advice! My husband has been really been expressing his unhappiness to me for about the last 6 months. I have been completely at a loss. He started out by saying, "It's me, not you." Then it was "You never listen to me." Then it was we are not compatible. Then now it's we are not going to work. He also states he has been feeling this way for the last 5 years. I really don't think he wants to leave not to mention financially we won't be able to make it! Plus we have two children (1 & 3) and he has a son (10) from a previous relationship. My husband is very hard to read because he is such a negative person and nothing makes him happy. So I know I should have seen the signs sooner but between the children, work, and every day life...I just don't have time to read between the lines! I ask him all the time and he just says I've been telling you! I tell him to write it down, because I'm not understanding! That goes in one ear and out the other. I recently had a breakdown and said a lot of things just to get him to react. I know that I did that because he reacts to nothing I do. I have tried not engaging in sex, I tried to just do my own thing, I have tried leaving him alone, I have tried to spend more time with him, but none of these things work. He just keeps pushing me away! He just ask me why I haven't said anything about my breakdown the other night when I basically told him he needs to decide if we are going to work on our relationship or are we going our separate ways because it's killing me! I told him that I was trying to self reflect and I do agree with him that I don't always HEAR him. I also told him that I don't want him to leave and I believe as long as we both love each other we have something to work for. I told him I hope we are on the same page. He told me that he doesn't think so. I didn't say anything and we ended the conversation politely. But I about died inside again!

I have read you crisis book and reading the other one currently! I will say I haven't had a chance to do the exercises yet but I'm working on it! Do you have any suggestions? I don't know how he will act if I bring this book to his attention because he is so against therapy! I'm trying to make this work for our family and our love! I really think we both lost each other in the process of building a house and making a family! I want him to find me again because I need him!

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

When you have been in a destructive pattern of behavior for an extended length of time, it is often easy for these behaviors to become entrenched, and for both of you to believe that there is no way out. It only seems this way because you believe it to be so.

Your husband has expressed his unhappiness, and it seems from your description that he seems unsure whose fault it really is. Firstly it's not you, it's him, then it is that you never listen, then it is that you are no longer compatible. This tells me he is struggling with the idea of the relationship not working, and finds it easier to blame you, partly to give a reason for his unhappiness, and partly to justify his wish to get out of the relationship.

If you are both unsure of how you both got to this, you are going to find it difficult to fix it. But you can start by loving your partner. That is explained in Chapter 7 of the crisis book. Love is a doing word, and if you are struggling with finding a way to connect as a couple, you need to find small ways to demonstrate your love and support for each other, even when you feel he won't reciprocate.

I have the benefit of seeing your relationship through different eyes, and what I see is two people who

are struggling to make sense of their feelings, make sense of what is happening in your marriage, and struggling to know how to react to it.

They say that marriage doesn't come with an instruction manual, and it's really true! You will never reach the end of your learning, and there will be something for you to learn every day of your married life. That's why marriage is such a challenge. Sometimes we get it right, sometimes we get it wrong. Don't think that you have to be perfect all the time. That's a really dangerous illusion to fall into. But the key to your marriage success is in knowing when you get it wrong that you are there to support each other and learn as a couple.

I have no time for so-called victims. Marriage isn't about being right or wrong. It's about growing and learning, sometimes being helped along, and sometimes being the helper.

Focus on being his friend again, and finding ways to show and demonstrate your love.

Give him a hug. Go away for a weekend together. Remove yourself from your everyday life. Remember what it is to simply love one another. It's not going to turn things around overnight, but it's a start.



This weekend, I found out that one of the main reasons for all our problems is my husband just found out that he does not 'connect' to people, including me. How do you show someone 'how to connect'?

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

I read that comment with caution, because in your husband making the comment that he has just found out that he does not "connect" with people including yourself almost validates the situation that your marriage is now in. Part of your marriage journey is that you are constantly invited into a state of learning as you grow in love for one another. This state of growth is a constantly evolving process and one that both partners are called into every day. Labeling the reasons for a marriage problem, such as your husband's inability to connect to people, perhaps narrows the scope for growth and places the impetus for change squarely on this one reason. Marriages, and more specifically marriage problems, are seldom this simple.

I would need to know what specific problems your marriage has to apply this comment, but I am inherently suspicious when your husband "just found out" this revelation about himself. If this lack of connection is true, it is something both you and your husband would have been acutely aware of for some time.

What does the term, in your mind, mean?

Is he distant and aloof, or is he simply shy? Does he lack certain social skills?

Does he have any friends? Does he make friends easily?

Does he have trust and intimacy issues?

Does he show feelings freely?

Is this something that you feel has always existed, or is it a more recent occurrence?

In what way is the connection to you different from his connection with others, such as friends and co-workers?

These are all questions I need answers to in order to put this term "connection" in context.



I need help. I have read both of the books and now have given them to my husband to read. I feel like I am alone in trying to save this marriage. He has finally opened up and told me that I do not honor him. He is right. I am making an effort to change my attitude. I want to be his friend again. I want to be someone he wants to be with. I am going to a counselor tomorrow. He refuses to do so at this time. I am trying to get past the fear of losing him. I do love him. I don't know what my question is I am just looking for more insight.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email. Without much detail I am limited in the insights I can offer you, but I have picked up on one comment you make in your email that may offer you something to focus on.

When you are re-opening communication with your husband it is vital that you develop a skill we call active listening. Active listening is when you stop your internal monologue as your husband is speaking, thinking about justifications for your actions, anticipating what he is going to say, and anticipating responses to what he is saying. Basically it is muting everything else that is going on inside your head and actually absorbing what he is telling you.

Listen to more than just the words. Listen to the emotion that comes with them, the words he has chosen, and the imagery he has created with his sentences. From what he has told you, can you picture yourself in his position and have empathy with how he feels? It's a tricky skill and may take some practice to develop. The key is that you are listening with your ears as well as your heart.

This is your husband's opportunity to give you very valuable feedback on what he feels is going on in the relationship and where he feels the problems are at.

Your husband told you that you do not honor him. Have a very careful think about that comment. What do you feel it means? In what way do you not honor your husband?

It may be that your husband needs to feel respected as part of your relationship, or needs to feel valued, both as a man and as a husband. I would encourage you to look very carefully at this issue and find ways to demonstrate to your husband that you are listening to him and that you do take his concerns seriously.

Love is a doing word, and I illustrate this point in Chapter 7 of Book 2. Please re-read this chapter and find tangible ways of demonstrating your love for your husband and adding to his sense of value as a person. Leave notes in his lunchbox telling him how much you value him or how much you love him. Compliment him when he does something nice for you. Listen to him when he is sharing thoughts with you. Make his favorite dinner for him. Find small but significant ways of loving him and show him that you are thinking of him and making an effort to change.

Smile and look at the wonderful things around you. When is the last time you noticed the flowers in your garden? When is the last time you walked with your husband through the woods or on the beach? When is the last time the two of you went out for dinner together or went away for the weekend?

Make time to enjoy what is around you and to share this with your husband. He needs to see you are making an effort to change before he is ready to reciprocate. Actions, not words, are going to offer him the greatest indication of how seriously you are committed to making this marriage work.

HER REPLY:

I have been doing nothing but active listening lately. I have stopped the urge to defend myself at every turn. I do several nice and loving things for him everyday. We have three children ages 8, 3 and 5 months. I don't put pressure on him to be here every time they ask for him or wonder where he is at. I am making such an effort. His parents confronted him two days ago and it seems that it set back any progress we had made. He blames me for their outburst. I had nothing to do with it. They see us everyday and just put two and two together. I have tried to reassure him that they love him or they wouldn't be so concerned.

I saw a trusted friend and counselor yesterday. He described to me in detail how my husband is acting and the emotions he is going through. He described the situation as a transition stage in his life. In this transition stage my husband is taking stock of the last ten+ years we have been together and his is saying "what if..." I agree with every detail of the description. It doesn't make it any easier. I didn't expect it to. His advice is to say just as committed as I have been and continue to do the things I have been doing. Because I am determined to hold on and wait for him to realize what he would be giving up he will come back.

Every day is a struggle to cope. I miss his smile, I miss his touch, I miss the great sex, I miss my partner, and I miss him! I tell him every chance I get that I love him and I will be here for him and for us. The ball is in his court now and I am so scared.

MY REPLY:

Hi,

The transition your husband is going through is a mid-life crisis, and it's not uncommon for a man to look back on his life at some point and consider the implications of the life decisions he has made.

At that stage he has two choices: he can look back and wonder "what if..." or he can celebrate the choices he has made and the fact that he has a supportive and loving wife and 3 wonderful children. He may choose to focus on the things that he missed out on, but he needs to remember that a lot of people that lived a different life to him may look at the life he has and wish they were him.

It's kind of like the grass is greener syndrome. You also need to consider that your partner may be depressed. Have you tried to get him to visit a counselor to talk through his feelings? At this time it is crucial that you maintain routines, so there is something normal for your husband to cling to, as well as providing routine for your children. This is something your husband may need to see a doctor for, and you need to be prepared for the fact that he may need some medication to help him out of this.

I understand that living through this is a struggle for you as much as it is for him. You miss the old partner, and you miss the connection and the intimacy that is a crucial part of your marriage. Stay connected to him through your support and your love. You may need time out as well. Make sure you have time out with your friends so you can let go of some of your stress and escape from the situation, even if it's only for a few hours.

Take time out to pamper yourself as well. Take a bath, get a massage, get your hair done, all things that can help relax you and help you get in touch with your feminine beauty. It is important that you are able to step outside the relationship and do things that nurture your soul.

I would also encourage you to create rituals where possible, and the first would be having time alone with your husband, away from the children, perhaps one night every couple of weeks. You can watch a movie together, go and have coffee, go for a walk, or do things that you used to do before you had children in an effort to reconnect. This may be your time in which you can communicate with him about what is going on in your relationship and where you can both be together and reconnect in the way that you did when you first met.

Above all, like your counselor friend identified, it is crucial to maintain routines and stay supportive. This is a cycle that you will get through.



My husband and I have been married almost 24 years. We got married after dating for 4 years when I became pregnant. I was in my senior year of college (I was able to graduate on time). He had opted out of the college scene and was working. He later went back and got an undergraduate degree. We have two kids – ages 23 and 15.

My husband suffers from psoriatic arthritis which first affected him at age 27 (he's now 45). He currently takes Celebrex which helps, but hardly eliminates symptoms. So he physically feels crummy a lot of the time and is frustrated by being unable to do things he once could (using certain tools to work on cars). He also suffers from a combination of depression and/or mood swings. He will not get professional help (and please don't have your advice be suggestions on how to get him to counseling). I have, over the years, tried every angle – trying to get friends to approach the topic with him, trying to express my concern for his well-being, talking to his regular doctor, asking if he would simply speak to a counselor who I was seeing. Finally, once in a moment of weakness (when he was making suicidal comments) he said he would go. I made the apt and he said I had taken his comment out of context and twisted it into an agreement, but he'd make good on it, because he didn't want to hear me talk about him not living up to a promise. We went and the counselor (the one counselor who I've found most helpful was unfortunately on vacation) made an opening comment about the fact that I had called

because I was concerned that he might feel suicidal. Well John considered that a betrayal on my part that I had discussed that outside his presence and hunkered into complete hostility mode. He announced that he had come because he said he would, but he wasn't planning to participate. After a painful 50 minutes, with mostly me talking we left and he talked about how I had opened up a memory for him (he was sent to a counselor as a kid when he got in trouble in jr. high) that was probably the worst of all his memories and made a very bad situation worse. It was a classic example of "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."

So... he's a great guy except for the mood problems and the lack of responsibility that I think stems largely from the bouts of depression. He has done a ton of stuff with our kids. As a Little League/ Babe Ruth coach he is probably the most desired by parents because of his rapport with the kids, emphasis on teaching both good sportsmanship and playing skills and the fact that that results in a winning record. Now he is the Scoutmaster of our Boy Scout Troop – a ton of work – and a big improvement over the previous Scoutmaster. And I might add, he loves me and I believe is 100% faithful.

So back to the problems. He completed his electrical engineering degree when he was 27 and had a couple jobs. Then he left the one job to do the same work but as an independent contractor. He has been self-employed for 5 – 10 years (I think closer to 10 years). In those years, he's had up and down periods – years that he did more fooling around than looking for work, a year when he earned over \$100K, a few good years, years when he became very stressed out and then the last 1 – 2 years where he has had times (most of 2006) where he was in what he calls "a funk."

For periods of time this year he did not return customer calls or emails for weeks, perhaps months. He claimed this stemmed from a disagreement one evening with me, on a night when he now says he was going to try and take Tylenol PM in an effort to get a good nights sleep and get into a more productive mode. I pushed him instead to go to hear our older son's band play. I didn't want to go by myself because I'm not comfortable with the neighborhood that the bar is in.

I think realistically the funk is more likely to have stemmed from the fact that his most major project was delaying payment, because the company they were working for had informed them they would not be paid until all problems at some level were resolved. So this major payment did not come and he ran out of money. A few times he said he needed \$500 or so to pay bills one month. Usually he would make a comment about expecting to resolve payment with this one company soon (he borrowed back when he was still conversing with them – not after he stopped returning their calls). My salary does not cover all of our actual expenses and so I had had to max out credit cards.

When John ran out of money in the late spring, he stopped paying his credit cards and bills. About the point that credit card companies started to call, he got a check for about \$3K from a different customer (I guess he had been doing some work). This allowed him to make payments. So the summer progressed without him being hounded. Our older son was home (he is a high school teacher now) for much of the summer and they worked on projects around the house (though older son was frustrated by how inefficient the process was and how little got done). Weeks went by where John didn't go to his office or open his laptop.

So in August the credit card companies began calling. We have caller ID and basically for much of August, Sept, Oct, now November we've simply been not answering these calls. Now, just in this last week, he and this other company finally reached some agreement (I think – it's not clear to me). John said he received a check from them, but wanted to look at his invoices, that he didn't think it was the right amount. Meanwhile about two weeks ago, one morning when he had gotten dressed to go to the office, then fallen into researching a topic related to my son's school, I couldn't stand his lack of focus on work and went in (I was working at home in other room of house) and said "John I need help financially." He said he didn't know what to do. That he didn't think he was ever going to see any money from this other job. That his other customer had only a small amount of work from him and the one check they owed him was only about \$900 and certainly wasn't going to be there today. He talked about how there is no work in the area we live for his skills. And that he hates doing it anyway. He talked about how he wished he had gone back to law school 5 years ago and how I had clearly had no interest in him doing so. Of course I brought up for the 100th time, that I would very much have wanted him to go to law school, that when (at the time) he had asked me how we could afford it, I had told him that I wasn't sure, that I thought he should take the LSATs anyway and we would try to figure out our options after that. He said (for the 100th time) that he knew from sample tests that he'd get a great LSAT score and he simply couldn't stand the idea of taking the LSAT and getting information from law schools if he wasn't going to be able to afford to go. That he couldn't bear the disappointment. He entirely blames me for his not going and I of course feel that if someone is not willing to risk disappointment, then they never will pursue their dreams and that that drive/ambition/willingness to risk had to come from John. Not me.

Okay, so after we go through the "this area sucks, I hate my job, I hate my life, it's all Anne's fault I'm not a happy successful lawyer" discussion, he goes to his office. He makes plans to sell every expensive item I've given him – a nice telescope and a Mazda Miata (that at the end of October in New York is not going to get its full market value, which might only be \$4000). He completely withdraws – doesn't answer the phone or the door bell. I went back to the house and got the spare key and came down by myself, fearful that he could have killed himself. I try to explain that I was not looking for a fire sale, that yes the immediate problem is great, but my biggest concern is the overall issue. John is very hostile "What do you want from me? Why did you come down here? I don't have any money to give you. Do you want me to rob a bank?" This remains the situation for about a day at which point John calls me and asks what I think he should do about selling the Miata. I tell him it's his car. It was a gift, but that IF it was my decision, I would not sell it. He says he doesn't feel he deserves the car. I said it isn't something to be deserved. It was a gift and I think he's worthy of enjoying the gift. Then he says that in opening some of the volume of unopened mail in his office, that he's discovered he still owns \$3000 of stock that he was unaware of and he can sell it online and get a check in about a week. This clearly has cheered him up and I'm thinking – well if I had said nothing, he wouldn't have been down there opening this mail that has sat for months and months.

SOOO.... Okay, here is my question. I was reading last night about the 6 issues that lead to divorce and thinking about our situation. It is clear to John that I think he's a great dad, but a crummy husband. So he sees that I'm disappointed in him. I mean, how can I not? I work quite hard and earn a good salary, but I have nothing but a mountain of debt to show for it. And I have to look at the phone to see who it is and whether I want to answer it. I have business ideas that I'm trying to pursue outside of my day job and I'd love to go from full-time to part-time at day job to have time to start-up other business. But I can't afford to and that stems from John's actions.

I was discussing this with another friend and he asked if John could contribute other things around the house. Like could he cook, shop or do laundry. He won't cook. He does frequently do laundry and will offer to shop – but doesn't know how to buy meat (what cuts I usually get, what's a decent price) and somehow always seems to turn it into "let's go shopping together" which doesn't save me anything. Again, he does a ton for Dan (our son) and I do try to remember to tell him how much I appreciate that (I'm sure I could do a better job of stating that appreciation) – but the bottom line is he knows and I can't deny – I think he's a great dad, but a not-so-great husband. How can I possibly shift this perspective?

I resent the fact that he takes no responsibility for our emotional well-being. I've suggested reading books about marriage and he won't and he becomes enraged when I suggest he needs professional help ("You think I'm SICK!") and he places an incredible financial burden on me AND holds me responsible for his professional unhappiness and failure. How can I respond in a positive manner? Can I really hide or not be disappointed in him?

P.S. I really do think he's a GREAT guy in many non-husband ways.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

You have put a lot of effort into writing your submission, and the detail that you included is fantastic. Your ability to identify what you feel the issues are in your marriage situation makes it a lot easier for me to assist you and impart advice.

I ask customers to provide as much detail as possible for a couple of reasons. The first is that it is a useful exercise for you to sit down and consider what the issues are in your marriage, and where you feel the problems are at. This helps you clarify the problems, which can often be quite complicated, and it can often be a more difficult exercise than first thought. It also helps you prioritize what you feel the most important issues are.

The issue here seems to be quite clear. This is not about his abilities as a father, but more so as a husband and his direct relationship with you. You identified that he is a great guy except for the mood problems and the lack of responsibility. This seems to be the crux of your marital issue.

I do believe from what you have described that he is depressed, and this could be for a number of reasons. The first is the arthritis that has affected him and the effect that this has had on his ability to do tasks as well as the constant pain he is in. Living in constant pain can make even the most. The second is some repressed memories from his childhood that have not been dealt with as evidenced by his last counseling session. The third possible reason may be related to his age, not quite a mid-life crisis, but perhaps regret at the opportunities that he felt let pass. Not studying law would be an example of this. It may also be conceivable that he feels intimidated by your success as a woman, and your ability to provide for the family in a way that he feels unable to do at the moment. Not being able to provide can be a huge thing for a man's ego, and may contribute in some way to the hostility he has to you.

It might be worth exploring ways to help your husband recapture his masculinity within your marriage, and a good way to start would be to let him do more around the house. Let him buy the meat. It doesn't matter if it's not right. It may be important to him to feel he can do it without your criticism. Make sure you praise him for the jobs he does around the house and the role he plays in raising your children. It is vital that he receives this praise. For further reading I would encourage you to take a look at the work of author David Deida, particularly *The Way of the Superior Man* or *It's a Guy Thing*. Both of these books explore the idea of masculinity and male sexuality and how to support this in your marriage.

The money problems have only added to the problems you already have as a couple, but I still feel that the main issue behind your debt is your husband's inability to manage his depression and take responsibility for the decisions that he has made.

He sees that you are disappointed in him, and I can understand this. However you need to make it clear to him that you do love and support him as a father to your children, but that you are disappointed in the way he treats you and how he makes you feel when he is angry and hostile. This is something quite different to being disappointed in him as a person.

If you do not like the behavior he has towards you, you need to challenge this behavior. Make it very clear to him that his blaming you for his problems is unacceptable. Tell him that as an adult, he is responsible for his own actions and his state of happiness in the same way you are responsible for your actions and their consequences.

I understand that you have tried getting him to counseling without success, however his inability to take responsibility for his actions as well as his hostile behavior points very clearly towards depression. If he refuses to seek treatment, there need to be consequences. Tell him you are no longer prepared to be in a marriage where you are blamed for everything and made to feel bad for caring. Tell him you resent the fact that he takes no responsibility for your emotional wellbeing. Tell him you need to feel nurtured and loved in the same way he does. Tell him how his hostile behavior makes you feel. You need to challenge his behavior, and this may mean threatening to end the relationship until he is able to show some commitment to modifying his behavior and seeking treatment.

One thing is sure. Your marriage cannot continue like it has. Placating his behavior by responding in a positive manner to his outbursts is supporting this, and this cannot be allowed to happen. When he is hostile and aggressive, you need to challenge the behavior or cease the communication. Your husband needs to understand that his negative behaviors will be challenged and that communication will be shut down if it continues. You need to reward good behavior with praise and negative behavior with a challenge.

This is not about you telling your husband that you do not like him. This is about you telling him that his behavior is unacceptable and needs to change. Behavior, not the person, is what you are trying to modify here. Unless you are able to challenge these behaviors your marriage problems are going to continue indefinitely.



My husband and I will celebrate our 33rd wedding anniversary a week from today. I, and everyone else I know, thought we had the perfect marriage until almost two months ago. At that time he told me that he had the following problems with me: 1) I was smothering him; 2) our sex life was boring; and 3) my weight had gotten out of control. I did do one thing right - I didn't immediately react by getting angry. Actually, at first, I didn't say much at all - I realized myself that our sex life had become boring awhile before he said anything, and I recognized that I had a weight problem. A REALLY significant one that had been affecting my life and health for sometime. The part about smothering him did surprise me. He told me that he feels that he needs to leave for awhile after the holidays to find out if he wants to stay with me.

I've made a lot of mistakes. I told him that I loved him more than anything else in the world and would do whatever he asked, if he would just stay. I did try to justify/explain all of it. It didn't help, of course, just made things worse. I became very "needy" - wanting reassurance all the time, calling him several times a day, questioning his moves - again, made things worse. I did do some things right - I immediately started to lose weight - I spiced up our sex life. I've told him recently, that I totally understand where he was coming from. I thanked him for letting me know that my weight was bothering him, because it made me realize that I needed to do something about it, if for no one else but myself. I also said that I was grateful for him making me realize that I needed to get out more with my family and friends, because since then I have realized how much I missed doing things with them. I also told him that I was much happier with our sex life.

What else can I do to help him realize that this marriage is worth saving and that he really wants to stay with me?

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

33 years is a long time to be married, so I want to start by telling you that you have a good foundation as a couple to work on, and plenty of reasons why this marriage is worth saving. In the course we talk about love, and in particular something we call real love. All marriages and relationships go through stages, from infatuation to lust, to romantic love or the honeymoon period, to utter chaos and the spawning of real love. The fact that you have been married for a number of years would indicate you are well past the honeymoon stage, and into what we call real love. Real love is when you realize your partner is not perfect, but you still love them. You love them for their differences rather than in spite of them. However the trap people fall into with marriage is that real love does require maintenance. Every day we are called to find new ways of loving our partner and expressing this love as we grow in love and understanding together. If you neglect the need to maintain your love, it becomes easy to fall into habits, perhaps take each other for granted, and one day wake up and find your relationship isn't at all what you had imagined it would be.

I think this is the stage you are at. Your husband has come to the realization that the relationship he is in may not be the wedded bliss, or the "happily ever after" that he imagined it would be. I think this is where a lot of the fairytales do us a disservice. For love to flourish throughout your married life, it requires an effort every day. He may feel that the two of you have fallen into a routine and that you don't excite each other in the way you did when you first met. This doesn't mean the love is gone. It simply means the love you feel for each other has changed and it requires more of an effort to understand it and find new ways to respond to it.

Your husband identified your weight and your sex life as issues that influenced his change of feelings. I am encouraged to see that you have taken up the challenge of losing weight and finding new ways to spice up your sex life. Being able to respond to your husband in such a manner is indicative of how committed you are to this relationship and you are to be commended for this. If you are able to respond to your partner in demonstrative ways rather than simply through words, it makes your commitment so much clearer than words alone.

The only issue we really need to discuss is that of your husband feeling smothered. You mention that you get out with friends and family more than you used to, which indicates that you didn't get out all that much before. This may have created a dependence on your husband that he didn't feel comfortable with. Being overweight to the point where it was affecting your life and health would have further added to your husband's sense of responsibility. He felt responsible for your love, for your health, for your emotional stimulation, and for your future. He felt overwhelmed. The wonderful thing about having independence and friends and family is that you can take control of your own happiness and destiny so that you can love your husband genuinely from within you rather than relying on him to provide the love and affection. David Deida, author of *"It's a Guy Thing"* and *"The Way of the Superior Man"* talks about how you must create your own health, success and happiness, and that it is important to grow beyond your intimate partner for your own happiness and that the next step on the path to emotional maturity is self-sufficiency and the gifting of love to each other. This is the step your husband is calling you to.

I would encourage you to go away with your husband for a weekend. When is the last time you did this? Spend some time reconnecting as a couple and sit down with your husband and take the time to talk. Discuss with him areas in which you can be more self-sufficient and decrease your dependence on him. Explain to him that you are with him because you love him, not because you are dependent on him. There is a big difference. Discuss what you have learnt since he told you what was bothering him about the marriage. Your greatest gift to him could be indicating to him that you have listened to him and that you are motivated to recapture your independence and vitality that once drew you together. Think of the person that your partner fell in love with. In what way do you think you have changed from that person? In what way can you recapture the fun things you liked about yourself 33 years ago? In what ways can you be self-sufficient? In what ways can you gift love to your husband?

Some time away as a couple may give you both the impetus for change that you have been looking for. Look at your husband's talk with you as a wake-up call. You now have the opportunity to make some changes in your routine that enable you to recapture some of the real love and vitality that attracted him to you when you first fell in love.



Hi. I have a lot of questions. We have been married 24 years and have got serious problems that have been with us from almost the beginning of our relationship. We have stayed together for many years but have really functioned as roommates. Our sex life has been over for 3 years and I have no desire for him at all. He doesn't even try anymore to initiate it. We are not mean to each other, but we just treat each other like friends. We don't fight and he works hard and so do I. We both have our own hobbies and friends. I sometimes think it is way too far gone to ever bring back, but he has been a part of my life for so long, I don't know how to imagine myself without him. He is a good man, but we have

issues that run very deep. He has offended me through his actions for years. He doesn't say things, but he makes life financially difficult and just goes along with life, as if nothing matters, except what he thinks matters. It is hard to explain in just a few minutes or words. Maybe I need to have counseling, so I wondered what your opinion might be and what step I might take next.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

From what you have written in your submission, your marriage was over a long time ago. Feeling offended by his actions, not sleeping together for 3 years, and not dealing with any of the issues that are plaguing your relationship, are all indicative of some serious problems.

At this stage you need to examine your reasons for wanting to stay together. Is it love? Is it commitment to each other and to your marriage? Or is it your love of familiarity and the comfort that routine brings?

You mention that you have no desire for him at all. This troubles me. Why then do you feel motivated to save a relationship that barely exists?

I'm not going to provide you with a magic solution to the many issues in your marriage. The next step you take from here is entirely up to you. But in deciding to save your marriage I want you to do one very important thing:

Consider why you want to save your marriage.

Is this about loving your partner?
Or is this about you?

If you are looking for ways to love your partner, I touch on this subject in Chapter 7 of Book 2. Love is a doing word, not just a feeling. Love your partner. Show him how much you love him if you indeed love him at all. You mention that you feel no desire for him at all. Is this a problem for you? It should be. He is your husband. If you feel no desire for him you need to spend some time examining why. What can you do to love him again? Do you want to feel valued? Do you want to feel loved both as a woman and as part of a married couple? Do you want to feel like your contribution is recognized?

The reason I ask you these questions is that I need to know you want to save your marriage for the right reasons. If your fear of being alone is your only motivation to stay together, it has effectively already happened. Consider your motivations. This will give you a clearer picture of whether you should get back together, and what issues need to be addressed if this is something you still want to do.

I need some more information from you before I can impart some advice.



My husband and I have been married 9 years, together before that for 3. I am now 32 and he is 39, we have 2 young children aged 6 and 16 months. I come from a broken home though now have the most amazing stepfather while my husband's dad passed away when he was 7 leaving his mum to raise all 5 children on her own with my husband being the youngest.

My problem is for the last 2 years, particularly the last 6 months I have felt very unfulfilled in our marriage and if there were a quick easy way to end our marriage I would take it. I feel taken for granted, used, unappreciated and most of all unloved and uncared for.

There are several issues which lead to my feeling like this:

Since the day we started living together I have 95% of the time asked him how his day was, wished him a good day and always looked after him when he wasn't well. I cannot remember when he last complimented me, asked me how I was etc. I have nursed him through 3 back operations (2 while pregnant, 1 with a new born) and 1 nasty dose of glandular fever (with a new born and 5 year old). I recently had my tonsils out and was in a great deal of pain for at least a week, not only did I still have to do the majority of the childcare but not once did he ask me how I was. He didn't make life any easier for me by helping out with meals or offering to do the grocery shopping, in fact he insisted on pizza for dinner 4 days later - not good on a raw/healing throat. This is why I feel unloved and uncared for, when you care about someone you ask them how their day was, how they are and you think about how they feel and because he doesn't I don't feel he cares for or loves me.

We have financial issues which, due to my inheriting a large sum of money at 30 I could solve, but as he won't sign a Contracting Out Agreement (which would protect my investment in the matrimonial home should we divorce) we have issues every week as he spends money before I can pay weekly bills with it. He gets paid weekly, I get paid monthly, our mortgage (which I could clear, but won't) takes a huge chunk of our wages yet he doesn't seem to see it as a problem. I have tried to suggest alternative ways to budget, change ownership of the house over to the children's' trust etc in order to reduce bills and he is not interested and gets quite angry as he seems to believe that I am trying to 'take him for everything he's got'. Which is why he won't sign the Contracting Out Agreement (similar to a pre-nup) as it doesn't take into account his earnings over the 12 years we've been together. He doesn't notice/care that it doesn't take into account my wages and the \$160,000 that my trust has already paid out to us to help us pay our mortgage. All the COA specifies is that should we divorce then I would get my initial deposit on our property and if I paid off our mortgage I would get that back too. I don't think I'm being unreasonable in expecting him to sign this, as in the short and long term our home life would be better off financially and we could get some savings under way and I would no longer feel as bitter as I do now. I long harbored dreams of being entirely debt free at 30 and now thanks to Andy I'll never be debt free, so I am very angry about this, but would be less angry if he made some effort to curb his unnecessary spending.

We both work fulltime but unlike him my job doesn't stop when we get home, granted he picks up our daughter from school and helps with bathing our youngest but once the children are in bed he's done for the night. I still have the following night's meal to prepare, lunches to make, bottles to do and often the washing to do, fold etc. When I went back to work in May last year I asked that washing be his job, from dirty washing basket to clean drawers, at first this worked well but he got slack and because I got tied of running out of my clothes and having to do our daughters uniform the night before it was required I have now taken over the majority of the washing duties. I would gently ask him to do the washing only to be answered by grunts and noncommittal noises, anything other than a gentle ask is

regarded as nagging and nothing gets done then. I am angry that my evenings are spent in the kitchen or folding the washing when he is either playing on the computer, sleeping on the couch (this REALLY makes me mad), watching TV or going out with his friends. I do have my own hobby, I voluntarily counsel people, but because my monthly meetings clash with his weekly rugby meetings I tend to miss out - though I am intending on putting my foot down this year.

I am sorry to ramble on so much, I just wanted to fill you in on the facts and backgrounds to our issues. We have tried counseling before as a couple about 3 years ago and while there were short term improvements and we each got some thoughts/feelings off our chests, there was no long term satisfaction. I am very hesitant to suggest more counseling as he was so reluctant last time, I don't think he feels there is a problem and if it's not broken it doesn't need fixing.

Over the last 5 years I have had clinical depression which I wouldn't have made it through if it weren't for my best friend and my mum, I am still on anti depressants for depression. I have also struggled with alcoholism and to a large part over come that too, though I have recently been drinking again behind my husband's back, it is unfortunately my way of dealing with stress and feelings of anger and bitterness. I am trying to stop but because of recent issues it's hard. He has found out about my recent drinking and when talked about he has told me it's not his problem, wanting to know why I am drinking again does not matter to him. During these trying times he has tolerated me, told me to snap out of it and called me pathetic, again, not once does he ask what he could do to help.

He is a nice enough person and does care for his children. He is a good dad, useful when it come to doing something he wants but is not a good husband. I see what my mum has with my stepfather and I want it too. My husband has caused a rift in my family through his immaturity and inability to grow up and take responsibility for his family, (my step father told him this and he did not take it well). Our communication is nil and we generally only talk about the kids, rugby, his work or our friends - that's if we talk at all, as we're in separate rooms most evenings. I feel I cannot talk to him about these problems because I get so upset no matter how hard I try not to and I can see him shut down. I have tried writing him letters and it doesn't help, we have tried mediation with a impartial family member and I don't know what to do next. I am exhausted and my health is suffering, I cannot afford another breakdown as I have my children to care about, I love my job and often it is what gets me through the day (that and my beautiful children). I may sound selfish but I feel if I'm not happy then the family suffers.

Last night we had an argument and he made it perfectly clear that if anyone was leaving the family home it wouldn't be him. He bought up the feud between my step father and him and it obviously still angers him as he thinks I'm not on his side (I'm stuck in the middle), he promised that my stepfather would never be forgiven and to me that's a large problem. He considers me a nag (????) which I find very hard to wear as I think I'm a lot more laid back than many I know. He thinks he pulls his weight around the house and I'm just uptight, boring and need to learn to relax and have fun, fair enough but it we're both relaxing evening chores won't get done and everyone, especially the kids and I will suffer. I may be fixed on routine but for my own sanity I need things reasonably consistent otherwise I get more uptight, having gone through depression once I am very reluctant to over burden myself and get run down again. Probably selfish, but it's only until our kids are older and able to handle routine upsets better.

I am fearful of the short term pain and upset of a divorce but I truly feel in the long term the children and I would be better off. My daughter notices how Daddy doesn't help mummy out and I don't want her to grow up thinking that's normal. I also don't want my son to grow up thinking it's ok to let your wife do all the house work and childcare. My family and friends are gold to me, and most of them are of the mind we should separate, they know us and their opinions do carry some weight with me. I don't think I can afford to let my heart rule my head any longer. It's got to the stage where I fantasize about him having an affair so I'd have a good reason to kick him out, anything to make the spilt easier.

Your advice would be appreciated

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

There is a lot of detail in your email and I thank you for sharing this. It certainly makes it easier for me to get an idea of the problem when you provide all the background to the issue, and you certainly seem to have a good grasp of where you feel the issues are at.

So the first part of your learning is in being able to document your thoughts, and to gather them in such a way that you are able to prioritize some thoughts and feelings over others. The reason I mention this is that it seems that you and your husband don't have lot of clarity to the issues you disagree on.

You have issues with your husband because:

- * you feel taken for granted
- * used
- * unappreciated
- * unloved and uncared for
- * his spending habits negatively affect your family's lifestyle
- * his refusal to recognize your financial contribution to the relationship
- * his lack of contribution to the daily chores
- * his lack of contribution to the relationship and family
- * his immaturity
- * his inability to take responsibility for his family
- * an inability to communicate as a couple
- * fear that the stress will cause another breakdown

In return, what do you feel the issues are as he sees them?

- * he feels unappreciated
- * he feels as though he can't spend time with his friends
- * he feels that you nag him
- * he feels that his financial contribution to the marriage is not validated, hence his refusal to sign the contract
- * your alcoholism
- * he feels that you don't support him - feud with stepfather

These may be some of the issues as I see them, and in order for you to come to some kind of understanding of what all the issues are in the relationship, you need to look at the issue from both points of view.

The first major issue as I see it is that both of you refuse to validate each other's place in the relationship. He doesn't validate your contribution, both financially and physically in helping out with day-to-day chores. While it may seem insignificant, sharing responsibility for how the house and family runs is actually very important. Marriage is a partnership, and the division of chores is a tangible way of expressing this. Your husband's refusal to take part and share in the daily chores is indicative of him not being present in the relationship. When he is doing this, he is acting as an individual. Your feelings of being taken for granted and feeling unappreciated stem from the action of your husband acting as an individual.

The second major issue is that of the finances. The first thing I am going to tell you is that it is not a money problem as such, but how you are exercising control over the relationship through your greater financial contribution. You have been married 9 years. You have been together for 12 years. Asking him to sign a COA quite deliberately illustrates your exertion of power over the relationship. As your husband, he is entitled to half of your assets procured over the course of your marriage. The COA is a way of signing away those rights should you ever divorce.

I understand that your intention is to protect your investment, but from your husband's point of view it is insulting. The message he gets very clearly from this action is that you have no faith in the marriage. Whether or not this is correct, he is entitled to have feelings about this in the same way you do. He has exercised his right to not sign the agreement as he is legally able to do, and at this stage you need to consider if the stand you are taking is going to cost you your marriage.

Pre-nuptial agreements are difficult at the best of times, but asking your partner to sign one 9 years into a marriage would be seen by many as unreasonable. As a compromise, you may want to look into investing the inheritance into your children's trust or into managed funds for the children's future and education. As much as you may disagree with your husband's position on this, you need to respect his right to have an opinion.

The third major issue, and one that is related to the first two, is your ability to communicate effectively as a couple. I do agree with you that your husband has more work to do in this respect than you, however communication skills are something that both of you need to take responsibility for. You mentioned that when you try to speak to your husband you see him shut down on you. Why do you suppose this happens? Is he feeling threatened? Is he feeling outnumbered? Is there another way you can approach this without making your husband feel threatened?

I think dealing with the financial issues first is going to go a long way towards opening up ground for dealing with the validation issues, and in this respect the communication issues would need to be worked on first.

1. Finances
2. Communication
3. Validation

When you are speaking to your husband about your feelings, what kind of words do you use? Is it, "You do...", "You make me...", and "When you do..."?

I want you to focus on "I" statements, and look at ways of discussing your feelings without apportioning blame. Nobody makes you feel a certain way. Ultimately you choose to react the way you do. I want you to use "I feel" statements, focusing on how you feel as a person and within the relationship.

"I feel overwhelmed"

"I feel invalidated"

"I feel lonely"

"I feel unloved"

"I feel sad"

In the midst of these feelings, also consider why you feel such anger and frustration toward your husband. You feel these things because you love him. You wish he would be a better husband. If you looked at him and felt nothing, it would be time to end the marriage. But while you are still able to look at him and have intense feelings, this tells you that as much as you may not like him, you still very much love him. That's a very powerful realization to have.

I want you to go back to counseling, or some sort of objective third-party mediation. I want you to be able to discuss your feelings, using "I feel" statements. Write down what you feel the major issues are for you. Then write down what you feel the major issues are for him. I want your husband to make two lists too. Then you can read them out in front of a mediator. Do you both agree on the issues? That's where you start.

Once you have talked about identifying the issues and talked about your feelings, I want you to follow this up with actions. Set goals, both short term and long term. Meet regularly to measure your progress. Your goals need to be achievable, and measurable. As you reach your goals, set new ones.

Most of your issues as a couple are stemming from your inability to listen to one another. I want both of you to actively listen. This involves shutting off the part of your brain that is justifying yourself or creating responses as the other is talking. Focus only on what the other person is telling you. Write down what they are telling you and read it back to them to reinforce that you are listening to what is being said. Do that for each other. It may be the single most powerful thing you do to start you on your marriage-saving journey.



Good Morning and thank you for reading this, about 10 months ago I began to notice that my wife and I were living separate lives and that we had become dis-connected. My wife Carol and I are parents of 6 and 4 year old boys. Carol is a great mom but she has become so focused on the boys that it seems like she doesn't care if I am around or not. She just turned 40 and is a stay at home mom and seems to be having a real hard time with it. So I started to go to counseling to work on myself and I have to admit that after going for a short while I learned that I had a lot of things to work on and change. After a few visits to the counselor Carol began to join me and for the next few visits she and the counselor

worked me over pretty good, but as soon as the focus left me and turned to her she said she would not go anymore. Carol is a fairly religious person so I asked a Christian counselor from our church to come and help us work through these things, so he came to the house every week for a couple of months and the three of us would read the bible and he was able to deal with any question or situation directly reading from the bible, but once again when the focused left me and moved to Carol she told both the counselor and me that she has her own relationship with god and even though she does appreciate what the Bible has to say it does not apply to where she is at right now so she didn't want to see him anymore either. So once again Carol doesn't want to take any responsibility for what has happen in our relationship and she has clearly stated that the problem lies with me and my over bearing personality. When I ask her when she is going to get back into the marriage she will say nothing is ever good enough or fast enough for you or she will say that she is doing the best she can. Carol and I have been married for ten years now and I don't drink, I have never hit her or verbally abused her in any way and I have never cheated on her. What I did not do was understand that she has had horrible relationships with most of the men in her lives from her father to stepfather and through the boyfriend stage. I also did not show her my appreciation enough and I'm sure to her I never seemed satisfied. I have worked on changing so many aspects of my personality and my life and I feel good about the direction I am heading and also the I have become a much better father and I continue to see a different counselor now just to keep working on what I can for myself.

All three of the counselors have said that Carol is stuck and scared and she must be realizing that I am doing everything I possibly can do to save and make this marriage better and that she has to begin to deal with her problems now. She tells me that she does still loves me, but that I need to understand that this my take along time for her to come back to me because she wants it to be genuine and that she is waiting for me to be consistent with my attitude and personality. I have to admit that I did all of the wrong things from the beginning of all of this; like buying her things and trying to hold her hand and hug her way to much and write her letters telling her how much I love her and promise to continue working on myself, but none of this did any good.

I guess my question to you is what to do next. The hardest part to all of this is that it is beginning to affect the kids and she doesn't want to talk about any of what we are going through. I love Carol and I am not going to give up so what I would like to do is come up with a way of calming her obvious anger and working on gaining her trust and friendship. The counselor I am seeing has been helpful for working on me, but I really don't have anyone to talk to or to give me advice on dealing with Carol. I would appreciate any help you could give and would gladly be willing to pay for additional help. Thank you again for helping me and reading this.

MY REPLY:

I want to start by telling you that you are doing a great job of handling this situation, and that your actions in seeking help through counseling and Christian counseling is a great indicator of how committed you are to this relationship. I think that's a really great place to start from.

The issue for your wife not wanting to participate in counseling is a fairly common one, and is particular to the way she sees herself and her role within the relationship. She is willing to participate in the relationship as far as it concentrates on changes that you can make, but is unwilling to participate in making changes herself.

When she is refusing to participate in the relationship, she is retreating into behaviors that are entrenched from her past, and acting as an individual, outside of the relationship. I wonder if her reluctance to participate is related to the issues she has had with men in her past.

The situation you are in feels powerless because of her refusal to participate, but there are tangible things you can do. The first thing is that you have more control over this situation than you think. While you can't control her actions, you have complete control over how you choose to react to her.

It is important that you are able to respond to her with love. When I mention love, I don't mean buying her things to telling her how much you love her. What I mean by love is trying to understand the fact that she is in a bad place in her mind and that the first part of counseling for her is recognizing that there is a problem. It's okay to not be perfect. It's okay to make mistakes. Unconditional love, the kind of love that a husband and wife feel for each other is strong enough to overcome imperfections. It's important that both of you are able to fully understand that.

You mentioned that this is starting to affect your children. How does Carol feel about this? Does she feel that this is something that should be hidden from the children, or is it something that you can all sit down and talk about? Children are much more perceptive than you think, and it is important that Carol realizes that your children already know that there are problems. One of the fundamental feeders of fear is not knowing, so it is important that Carol realizes that if you are all able to talk about and be honest about what is happening, a lot of the fear is removed. Your children don't have to know all the details. All they have to know is that Mum is unhappy and is motivated to seek help so that she can be a better mum and family member.

There is no easy answer to your situation. Your wife believes the problems are to do with your overbearing personality. That's her choice to believe that. You have used this process to become a much better father and husband, and you can see that you are making real changes within yourself to become a better person. Don't fret about the fact that your wife doesn't see it yet. Demonstrate to her through your actions and unwavering support that you have changed, and that transformation is possible for her too if she is able to take a risk.

Before she is ready to fix her issues, she needs to accept them. It's okay to have trust issues. It's okay to not be the perfect husband or the perfect wife. But when you are aware that there is a problem, how you choose to react to it determines whether this is a growth opportunity or something that is going to hold you back from happiness.

Accept your faults. Accept hers. Love her unconditionally. Communicate this to your children.



My husband and I have been married for 16 1/2 years we were high school sweethearts and married when we were 20 and 21. We have two sons ages 15 and 11 and although it had it's ups and downs, we were pretty happy. My husband is non confrontational and we rarely fought. We would hardly ever raise our voices to one another. My husband is more passive/aggressive than

anything else. He was a great guy who would do anything for anyone. He is easily influenced by his peers and co-workers. About 6 years ago he started a sink hole remediation company with a neighbor we had just met. I never had a really good feeling about this guy, however, I supported my husband. My husband had the know how and this other man had the business sense end of things. Well for some reason my husband made an agreement with this man that the wives were to know nothing about the business. This really put up a wall in our marriage. I would ask how his day was and other questions to feel like I was a part of his day.

I always got just the basics. Well I discovered a few years ago that he started smoking cigars, going to strip clubs, and occasionally having a drink with lunch. All things my husband did not do in the past. I also found out that he was hiding cash job money from me and the boys. He started buying old cars and staying at the shop until 9 or 10 at night with no phone call. I had grown frustrated over the years that I was left to do it all including work full-time as a teacher which is a demanding job in itself. He never wanted to hear about my day. I did not like the person he was becoming with the lying and sneakiness. I stayed to give my children a stable home life and hoped things got better. I could not believe this was the same man. I am sure I was not pleasant to be around sometimes, because I was building up resentment towards him. Well to make a long story shorter, this man ended up embezzling \$300,000 from the company. I tried to tell my husband something wasn't right, but he never would believe me. It took the office people to convince him. I did not feel worthy to him. Once he split from his partner, he helped out more at home and came home by 5. My husband has to be reminded about things and has a hard time following through on things. Most of the time I felt like his mother rather than his wife. I did not like this at all. Me doing for him and not getting much in return or feeling validated. He had changed so much. He was overwhelmed by having to run the business himself with the few people in the office. He really didn't handle that before and didn't have the know how. I know his stress level was up, so I would offer to help, but felt he wanted to do this on his own to prove himself, so I backed off. Well now, he began to have an affair 9/18/07 was the first phone conversation I could find when I pulled up his cell phone account. As the months went on, the calls and text messages increased. It was sickening because there would be so many to her and one to me to find out the evening plans. I did not find out until 2/18/07. I am just sick. I do not deserve this and this is so out of character for my husband. I don't know who he is anymore. I do know that January was an extremely stressful month for him, because his accountant told him he had to fire his niece and let another guy go who was cheating on his hours.

My husband has a small company, that is just getting by. We have just about always been tight with money, just getting by. His company is the same, struggling to just make payroll every week. There was this one man who met my husband in October, and then saw him again in February and asked what was up with him, because that was not the same man he met in October.

My husband's mom passed away when he was just 22 yrs. old and I am not sure he ever got over it. He was extremely close to his mom and she died suddenly. He is the baby of six siblings. At the end of January he sat in my car and cried like a baby, he said, "I am trying to talk to my mom and she won't answer me." I had not heard him talk about his mom in years. I could not believe what I was hearing. After I found out about the affair, I guessed it was because moms make everything alright and he was in a mess. Well, February 11-12 he just didn't come home until the next morning, after he told me he was going for a drive to clear his head.

I knew something wasn't right, because he had to go for a drive often, but I would have never guessed it was an affair. That's just not like him. Well it has been 4 months now, and he is still living with her. He says he has feelings for both of us. On Valentines Day, only a few days after he moved out and went to live with her, he brought me 6 carnations and this religious card that thanked me for making him the man he is today and how much he loved me. I found this odd since he wasn't even living at home. I know he feels guilty and thinks we could never get past this. He also made a comment to one of our friends that said, "If i went home, things would be good for awhile, then our first disagreement, she would throw this in my face." I was so hurt when I heard this, because I am just mortified. Our boys are in just as much shock as I am. We feel abandoned and betrayed. My older son really doesn't want to see his dad and won't go with him. He just recently didn't have any contact with the boys for 3 weeks. He told my younger son one Sunday that he was at his friend's house with her and her daughter. My son was so upset. I do not know if he is depressed or if this is a mid-life crisis or did he just want out of our marriage and didn't know how to get out other than having an affair. I am very confused and I feel I don't deserve this pain and hurt. We are all hurting. He only seems interested in having fun. He left me with all the responsibility of the kids and bills. He went to two birthday parties last weekend and is going camping this weekend. It is not right for him to have fun when we are hurting. I have tried to block him out and let go. I am in counseling. I had my older son to counseling twice, but she said she could not crack him. He won't even talk about it. She said it is too overwhelming for him and he has blocked it out. We will try again in a little bit. She said he is not in a bad place, just he is not ready to deal with it. My other son is more verbal and is always asking daddy to come home and come back to us. I think he is trying to convince himself he is happy with her, because she is not his type (wild). She is divorced with two kids 20 and 13 and she is older than him by 3 years. He says he doesn't have to pay anything over there because she has money in the bank. She even told him that she has \$150,000 in the bank. I don't know as if I believe this from the looks of the house she lives in. I feel he doesn't have any responsibility to deal with and he has his freedom. He chooses when he wants to see the kids. He is paying me every week, although I have to ask for a check most weeks and he pays the mortgage but that is it. He doesn't offer to help out with soccer practice or anything else. I am starting to lose respect for him, however, I still love him and want him to come home so we can start working this out. I am ready, but he won't leave her. He is indecisive. I have talked with him about having fears and that is normal. I told him I have them too. Can you please advise me what to do. Is this marriage over and should I seek a divorce, or should I just hang in there and see how this plays out for a while? I know time is a healing factor, however, I feel like I have already been patient for 4 months. Please help me and my children who are feeling so hurt. I have read both books and have learned a lot, but I can not use the strategies if he is not there. I had even gone to a psychic who swore he isn't going to stay with her, I even went to another one who said the same thing. I do not want to live on false hope. I pray all the time and read my bible (the book of Job). My dad suggested I read that chapter. I am trying to understand why my life is in this place, because I did not choose this, however, I am forced to deal with it. Please help!

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email and the detail you have put into describing your situation.

There are a number of issues that I identified as I was reading your submission, and while you may feel angry and powerless at the situation you have been placed in, there are a number of positive actions that you can take in order to make improvements.

The first thing I want you to know is that I agree with you when you mention your anger at being forced to deal with this and did not choose it. Nobody chooses a marriage crisis, and coming to terms with the issues in your marriage can be, for some, an awakening. For many couples, married life is a bubble where they aren't really challenged by anything, and in many ways I feel these couples have never really lived.

What your marriage crisis is doing is calling both of you into growing, both in understanding of what is expected of each other in the relationship, but also growth in finding new ways to love each other. It is easy for couples to fall into the trap of familiarity after being married for a few years, and to perhaps take each other for granted. It seems from what you have written that your husband takes you for granted, and fails to recognize the contribution you make both to the marriage and to the family.

The first sign of problems was indicated when you mentioned that your husband and his business partner decided that the wives were to know nothing about the business. In terms of the partnership, your husband stepped outside of the marriage and started thinking and living as an individual from that day forward. In allowing him to run the business without your input, he was no longer participating in the marriage.

The issue as I see it is that this behavior started from here, and gradually your husband started pulling away from the marriage, bit by bit. He started smoking cigars, went to strip joints and spent less and less time at home with his wife and children. As he pulled away and started acting as an individual, these behaviors became entrenched. The stress of his financial worries only further compounded the issue and caused him to withdraw into these newly learned behaviors even further.

Saving your marriage involves addressing two key issues:

1. Unlearning learned behaviors in your husband and finding ways for him to participate in the marriage again.
2. Finding positive and appropriate channels for stress

At the moment he is reluctant to give up his life with the other woman because he has absolved himself of the responsibility of the marriage and family. Financially he is being supported by someone who can help, in very real terms, ease the financial stress and burden upon him as he rebuilds his business. That is something that is going to make it difficult to pull your husband away from. Is your husband's new woman aware of his financial situation? Is she prepared to support him indefinitely? If she is aware of the amount of financial support your husband needs, do you believe the relationship will last?

In order to encourage him back you need to appeal to him in a way that the other woman cannot. You have two children who need a father. Financial support is not enough. Your sons need physical and emotional support from a male role model.

It's important here to realize that while you have no control over your husband's actions, you have complete control over how you choose to react to him. He has washed his hands of responsibility, and I can understand your anger and frustration. However, you need to consider how your reactions are helping him trust and communicate with you again.

s much as you feel hurt by his actions, you still love him. Focus on that feeling. Love your husband even if he is unable to love you. Think of all the reasons you love him. Read chapter 7 of Book 2 where we talk about how love is a doing word. When you vent your anger and frustration you make it harder for him to choose you. You need to love and support your husband, and show him that while you don't condone his actions, he has a family that loves and supports him and wants him to make positive changes in his life. By loving him you are accepting that there are mistakes made but the love you have overrides this. The love you have for one another is more important than the way you have made each other suffer.

I want you to sit down and make a list of the positive changes that he can work towards making. Then I want you to do one for you too. What ways can you make changes that bring you closer together as a couple? What do you want from a new relationship with your husband? Do you want a better lover? Do you want a more supportive partner? Do you want a better father for your children?

Consider what positive changes all of you can make, and how you can support each other in achieving these goals.



my wife and I have been married for 16 years. Through this time we have had our ups and our downs. We have two wonderful children. A boy 15 years old and a girl who is 13 years old. My wife and I got married earlier than we had planned to because we became pregnant with our son. After he was approx 3yrs of age we were concerned with his ability to talk clearly etc... He was eventually diagnosed with Autism. This has been a really traumatic event for us. My wife really went all out to find out about his problem hitting it head on while I went into denial for a long time. I was involved with his treatment with her however- we took him to several hospitals in the region, got support through the local school system and did everything possible to get him the best care that we could. I was with her through all that I could with the exception of a lot of the rearing part. I worked 2nd and 3rd shift as a supervisor in the mfg field. 5 years ago I went for a higher paying job- again on 3rd shift and was hired. Because of this I missed a lot of things because of being detached somewhat from my family. While I am at work they are asleep. While I am at home sleeping they are away at school and work. The bottom line is I failed her, she feels that I wasn't involved enough. There were other problems- early in my marriage after my son was born my wife felt that I was having an affair- I wasn't. I have always been faithful to my wife. The end result was that she had an affair. It was over by the time she broke down and told me about it. Because I loved her I forgave her. She wouldn't tell me who she had the affair with. It really didn't matter to me to know then. It seems like our marriage has been the victim of a lack of communication. There is more- when she was young she suffered from two traumatic incidents in her life. 1.) She was molested by a family friend when she was 12 and then 2.) she was the victim of date rape when she was 16. Apparently her date got her drunk and then took her virginity. She has been carrying these problems with her her whole life. I haven't made things any easier for her. I have a confidence problem. At times I am extremely jealous; when we fight she clams up, cuts me off for weeks at a time and basically leaves me to myself. I would rather fight it out to get to whatever is bugging her or me- get the problem out in the open and resolve the conflict. Currently I am going through this. It's been three months without any real physical attention from her. She suggested marriage counseling and I agreed to go. She wants to

wait until she gets through a personal health crisis 1st. She has been passing huge blood clots during her menstrual cycle- she goes for a biopsy June 25th, once the results are in- if everything else goes well she is going to schedule a mental therapy session to consider her options. She is in the early stages of menopause. She has a serious anger problem, she holds everything in until she blows up. She feels that I have failed her in so many ways. She is currently going to college to become a Special Education Teacher. She is very smart and very pretty and has a gorgeous figure. She gets whistled at a lot. I just want her to notice me and pay attention to me more. I feel like our marriage is slipping through the cracks. She talks to me but makes a lot of small talk. I hate small talk. She has a friend that recently went through a divorce and is now re-married. To a better man who makes more money etc... I'm thinking that she is on the verge of going to greener pastures. I'm sure that if it wasn't for the kids I would have already been a figure in her past. She says she loves me when she leaves for work, that sort of thing. I am worried that she might be considering fooling around again- I don't know, I want to trust her but I find myself checking her cell phone. She is so distant right now- I guess because she is hurt at me. When I want to touch her she says I think all she is is a piece of meat. That's not true. I know I have to stop this kind of behavior because it will only hurt her more if she catches me. I want her to fall in love with me again, I want to feel important to her again- the way we used to be. I'm not a 10 by any means but I feel that I am reasonably handsome, probably between a 7 and an 8. I used to be buff sort of but now I am 41 yrs old with love handles and grey hair and balding. I am a Major in the Army Reserves and I am a Technical Director for GE at a locomotive maintenance and repair facility locally- I have a better than average job, a lot of people in this area would kill to have my job. Between my full time job and my Reserve job I make \$63,000 or a little more with O.T.. We are climbing out of debt slowly but surely. We have a dream to have our own house. I am a very hard worker, I feel that my major role in the marriage, especially initially is to be the very best provider I can be. I feel that I am open but will hold back my feelings especially if it will cause conflict and clam her up again. I came from a poor family- divorced/dysfunctional because my Dad was an alcoholic. My mother and Father fought all of the time. My wife's mother and father fought all of the time too. Her father was a womanizer- he went out on her mother a lot. I tried to give you all of the info I could. What can I do, give me some tips, some tactics that I can engage her in to get her back to the discussion table to sort out our problems. I love her and I think she loves me too. Otherwise why would she be with me? I want her to notice me, to be turned on by the way I look again and to attract her to me. Send me everything you possibly can- I need all the help I can get.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email.

It was very well written and I feel you have covered the main points very well, and I can identify a number of areas that need attention. The first thing I am going to tell you is that there is no such thing as the perfect marriage. Perfection is a dangerous illusion, as I talk about in the course, and just because there are a few problems doesn't mean you have failed her.

Marriage is a journey, a continuously evolving period of growth as you both figure out how to live together, create a life for one another, and how to love each other every day. I often talk to clients about mistakes, and to be honest, it is a very important part of growth. If you never made mistakes, you would never learn, so let's look at it that way.

From what you have written, I can see that you and your wife are approaching this from two very different perspectives. You have written that you believe your major role in the marriage is to be the very best provider you can be. I think you have performed this part really well, and bring a good amount of income into the home. However, this comes at a cost. The hours you spend at work come at the expense of time spent at home with your family. I can see from this that you are put in a very difficult position. You feel the need to provide for your family, while your wife feels that you need to spend more time with the family.

It's all about balance, and understanding where each other are coming from. Your wife needs to understand that if you spend more time contributing to the family, this will come at a cost to your income. It also sounds as though you are both seeking validation for the contributions you make, she for looking after the children, and you for providing the income. What both of you need to understand is that contributing to the marriage is not a competition, but some recognition is necessary.

When is the last time you told your wife how much you appreciate what she is doing with the children? When is the last time you told her that you value her and her contribution? It's that kind of feedback that she may be yearning. You want to feel important to her again, but it starts with you making her feel important. You hate small-talk, but she loves it. To a woman, small-talk is an integral part of communication in a marriage, and a good way of feeling connected to a partner. If you can't come in at the end of a day and talk about how your day went, what are you going to talk about? In what way do you share your experiences, fears and dreams?

This sounds to me as though your wife is crying out for attention, and you need to find ways of giving her the attention she needs. It's about fulfillment. Fulfilling her emotional and intimate needs. I want you to read Gary Chapman's "*The Five Love Languages*." Find out what your love language you show, and what language you best respond to. Then I want you to examine what language your wife shows and responds to. You may find the love you show your wife, through acts of service for example, is incompatible with her love language. She may need words of praise. It's a good book, and I encourage you to read it.

You both need to feel validated and loved, and this comes through very clearly in your writing. Start by looking at Book 2, focusing on Love is a Doing Word, and find ways to love your wife. Find out what her love language is. Find ways to reconnect. Communication is about much more than just talking. You need to know what to say and do. If you are able to make the first move, she can follow your lead and find ways to notice you and give you the attention you need to.

You are being called into finding new ways of loving and supporting each other. Read the books.



I am now a stay-at-home dad for our children (7 and 4). The way our family runs things seems untraditional. Therefore about 50% of what I have read amongst "Save My Marriage Today" applies. Here is my story and my need for help ...

After being a teacher for 10 years we had our first child and we decided that I would stay home; and

that has worked out wonderfully for our family. 4 1/2 years ago I was diagnosed with cancer (brain cancer - glioblastoma multiforme, grade 4) and was told I had 8 weeks to live. At that point, my wife was 8 months pregnant with our second child.

Going through surgery, 7 weeks of radiation, 2 years chemotherapy, and a clinical trial I am still here. During that period of diagnosis and prognosis my wife refused to talk about a future without me. For the first 18 months she did everything for/with me. Her love and support surely allowed me to remain positive and work as hard as possible to become a survivor. At that 18 month mark, she accepted a new job in a different state; we went from the beach in southern California to Cleveland, Ohio.

Since we have moved and she started that new job our relationship, friendship and love, has lowered to the bottom of her daily/weekly/yearly itinerary. My perspective and beliefs of her actions put our relationship far below her work and our children.

I have tried many ways to simply have her share her feelings/thoughts/beliefs with me regarding our relationship and her work and she continues to remain quiet. I have watched her deal with her stress differently than the ways I do; she exercises a ton, buys new clothes and shoes almost daily, has her hair done biweekly, goes to tanning salons, and gets her teeth whitened. She does not talk, or share her feelings. We have been together for 18 years, so I continue to read her facial expressions, posture, etc. to do my best to make her happy and keep our relationship a positive one.

She continues to seem constantly concerned with what everyone, except me, thinks of her. Her job places her as a public figure. Weekly she is in the paper, on television or doing a radio interview. She works at least six days a week and is gone from 7 AM until 9 PM. I understand how difficult it is for her but again our marital relationship is lowest on the list.

Obviously her work is a major problem for me. The second biggest problem is that for the last year and a half we have slept in different rooms. It began shortly after moving to Ohio. She has allowed our son to sleep in our bed every night. I have explained to her how positive it would be for both of us and him if he stays in his room overnight, but she refuses. She says when he cries, I stay asleep and that forces her to get up. I told her that his crying would only last a few days and then he would grasp crying would not allow him to sleep with us. I asked her to simply wake me and I would deal with him, she refused.

This leads to further parenting differences between the two of us. Our children see me as the "mean" parent. I do not give our kids whatever the "want". I give them what they "need". I believe my wife gives them whatever they want. She sees them, on a good day, for one hour and wants to make up for being away so long.

I have asked her to simply spend time with me, get a babysitter to provide the opportunity. Her response was, since we have been together for 18 years and she hardly ever sees our children she would rather be with them and/or have the four of us together. I told her that I understand where she is coming from but am still unhappy.

Along those lines here's more ...

We have not made love for almost two and a half years now. Of course sleeping in different bedrooms does not help but I have been concerned for a long time that she is having an affair. However, I cannot prove it. My big question is based on the fact that she continues to use birth control. She went from pills, to the patch and recently I found out she uses a vaginal ring.

That product arrived at our doorstep one day. On the box it said "must be refrigerated within one hour". I called her at work to ask her what it was and left her a message. After 90 minutes not getting a response, I opened it up to place it on our fridge thinking it was food. I was wrong. When she returned home that night I asked her why she was using it since there was truly no reason to. She told me that because she has been on birth control since the age of 16 it is what her body needed. That really scares me.

I was finally thinking that our relationship was over. I set up an overnight date together at a local hotel. I spoke to her assistant three weeks early to schedule "fake appointments" so that she would be free for the day and had one of our friends volunteer to take care of our kids overnight. I drove to her work to pick her up and surprise her. After explaining to her how I arranged the date she told me that she could not go, that her assistant was not aware of "everything she does". I was completely saddened and began to give up on us.

I tried one more time to do something based on our relationship issues for our anniversary. I gave her two things, one religion oriented mini statue of a husband and wife hugging based on my feelings for her and, a book purely for humor about using sex for a physical workout. She gave me nothing, not even an anniversary card. Two days later I shared with her that I was upset. She told me she forgot to get anything because she was so busy at work.

A few months ago prior to me going out of town for a week I put together a package for her. It contained dozens of cards I have given her in the past 18 years, ones where I shared my feelings of love with her. I also added photos of the two of us, some from when we first met, some wedding photos and many others showing us being happy together. I included a new letter on the top of it all sharing my feelings, telling her that I wanted to something to fix our marriage even go to a marriage counselor. When I returned home she said nothing about it. Three days later I asked her if she looked at it. She said she read it and liked it but we still have done nothing. When I ask her to do something she replies that she is too busy at work.

I have done everything I can. I have read your books and have come up with more things to do. I am doing them now but want/need more ideas that you believe will work.

MY REPLY:

Thanks for your email and the obvious effort and work that was put into it.

It certainly sounds as though your wife is so immersed in her job, that she forgets the reason we work at all: to live. Some of us work to live, and others live to work. It may take the breakup of your marriage, the division of assets, shared custody of children, and the realization of being middle-aged with nobody to go home to before she really gets it.

It's about balance, and it sounds as though things are wildly out of touch. I applaud you for the effort

that you have put into organizing time away, marking anniversaries and special events, and how you have tried to reach out to her.

I'm always reluctant to suggest it, but a trial separation, where one of you agrees to shift out for a set period of time, may be the touch of reality she really needs. How is she going to hold down a job and take care of the children if she works 7am to 9pm? Is she in a position to hold down a job and a family life if you weren't there to support her?

A trial separation may seem like an extreme measure, so a more subtle approach may be in making yourself less available so that she can see things from a different perspective. Organize a day out with your guy friends on her day off, leaving her at home to care for the children. Book a weekend away to visit some friends, watch some car racing, go fishing with buddies, or any other pursuits that you are interested in.

Tell your wife that you are taking up golf or another type of sport. Tell her that you won't be home for a few days to take care of the children, so she needs to organize some childcare or a babysitter. Spend some time reconnecting with your friends, doing things that give you some pleasure, and see how she reacts.

I want you to do this for two reasons: You need to get out more and enjoy yourself. You spend far too much time being taken for granted by your wife. The second reason is that your wife needs to realize how much you do for the family, and how much she takes your input for granted. Simply not being available is the most effective way to do this. Don't ask her if it's okay for you to go away for the weekend. Simply tell her you will not be here. Make it her problem, not yours. Keep this up for a few weeks, and see what happens.

It's time for you to get her attention.

