



“Red Sky At Morning...”
Marital Warnings Signs

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Red Sky At Morning... Marital Warning Signs

“*Marriage is an institution instituted by God, and is therefore holy,*” intones the minister, and we all nod our heads in agreement. In truth, some marriages DO seem to be made in heaven. But the dirty little secret that is hiding around the corner of our minds is that some marriages do not. But we don’t want to say anything about *THOSE* marriages, do we?

Yes, marriage is created by God; yes, it is intended to be holy. But that’s not a guarantee, is it? For some, unfortunately, marriage not only isn’t holy, it’s a holy terror! And the fact that we don’t want to talk about those marriages means, in effect, if you are not one of the lucky ones who “chose wisely,” sucks to you, see you in Heaven.

The reason for this .pdf is that there are some marriages that don’t measure up to what the Church has advertised, and I hope that these articles are able to help those who feel lost in lackluster (or worse!) marriages. Let me state up front that I don’t claim to be an expert on marriage, a professional counselor, or a pastor, and I am not some all-wise and all-knowing marriage guru. What I am is someone who has made 70 trips around the sun; I hope I have learned something about life, living, and marriage.

In this .pdf, I have gathered several posts from my blog that were written to serve as wake-up calls for people in less than optimum marriages (okay, I admit that’s being kind). While I make suggestions and offer counsel, I am not offering any hard and fast rules for “getting the marriage of your dreams.” The articles I present are intended as helps in assisting you in realistically examining your current situation, and then helping to discover a way forward in your marriage.

It is said that the first step to fixing a problem is admitting that you have a problem. The purpose of this .pdf is to help you to bring clarity to your situation. It isn’t to serve as an answer book, and certainly doesn’t carry a guarantee that you can fix your marriage, but as I said, knowing you have a problem is the first step in attempting to do so.

It is my firm prayer that it will be of help to you.

CSL

As always, my disclaimer

Disclaimer: I am not a counselor, doctor, or pastor. For that matter, Wife says I don’t play well with others. My advice and comments come from my concern for hurting Christian husbands and wives. Someone once said to me, “Church shouldn’t hurt”, and I believe the same thing goes for marriage. I’m going to call ‘em as I see ‘em, but please, don’t take my word as gospel. Yes, read what I say, pray about what I say, but do your own “due diligence.”

Chapter 1: Lost Toys, Lost Joys

Time to drop another veil, here, folks. Here in the CSL household resides a tribe of Anglophiles. We purely love us some British programs. Our collection of Dickensian dramas is second to none. So you can imagine the joy with which Wife and I, as *Downton Abbey* fans, greeted the issuing of the series' final season on DVD. Since we have Netflix, we are going to rent them, but before doing so, we are going through all the old seasons, to watch them as one whole story.

This week, in going back to the beginning season, I was surprised by a scene that I remembered only after viewing it again. In this scene, Lord Grantham makes a comment about his oldest daughter, Lady Mary, who, just to spite her sister Edith, ignored the one man who cares for her in order to flirt with a man who showed interest in Edith. When her would-be suitor observes Mary flirting with another man, he leaves, keenly feeling her slight. Mary only realizes what she has done after his departure and it is then that Lord Grantham comments about his daughter's conduct:

“Mary can be such a child. She thinks that when she puts a toy down, it will still be there when she wants to play with it.”

“The Island of Abandoned Toys”?

I know my Rudolph! It wasn't “*Abandoned Toys*,” it was “*The Island of Misfit Toys*,” I know! But despite the fact that some guys are told that they are misfits, what with being accused of sex addiction and/or perversion, for the most part there is nothing wrong with them. They're not misfits, they're simply abandoned. (And, yes, I also realize I'm mixing metaphors!)

This may sound like I'm addressing a mere stereotype, but there is some truth to the idea that prior to marriage, and even in the beginning of marriage, many women/wives ARE sexual with their boyfriends, fiancés and new husbands. But all too often, something changes in the marriage, and this plaything, her “toy”, is set aside, and left feeling abandoned.

But wait, there is hope, isn't there? After all, in that *Downton Abbey* episode, Mary realized what she had done, and went to look for Matthew (that's his name, for future reference). But she found that, for her, for that evening at least, it was too late. He left, prompting the comment that led to this post.

Hope Deferred....

Since I'm mixing memes, tropes, stereotypical roles, or what-have-you, let me play with yet another. For many wives, stereotypically, libido comes roaring back in their 40's or

50's, and they are now, finally, ready to play. Whether it be the onset of menopause and not having to worry about getting pregnant, or not having to worry about kids around, the stresses that dampened libido are gone, and now, with pressure released, libido returns. But all too often, the toy is damaged—badly damaged—and is no longer available, and she discovers Lord Grantham's statement to be true: the toy won't always "still be there."

Yes, there is hope, as I said above. Thankfully, there are many stories and testimonies of marriages in which there has been a transformation. These testimonies tell how, after one or two, even three decades, marriages that have been characterized by gatekeeping and/or refusal have been changed and transformed. Several bloggers that I follow tell of the changes in their marriages. So, yes, these testimonies tell of the experience of being able to return and find the toy that they had set down, that it was still there for them, that there is hope.

But nothing is guaranteed, is it? Yes, those wives did experience God's grace in their marriages. I know of at least two in which the wives asked their husbands for forgiveness, confessing that their refusal was sin, and exhibited repentance. The two that I am thinking of, specifically, had the same experience, down to even the same words of forgiveness from their husbands: "There is nothing to forgive," followed by restored intimacy and connection.

But when you read around and discover the stories of husbands who tell of years upon years of sexual frustration and denial, sometimes you see scripture, unfortunately, fulfilled:

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, ..." (Prov. 13:12)

Chris Taylor has a page on her *Forgiven Wife* blog for husbands to express their sorrow and pain, entitled *Your Husband's Hurt*. There is also an older FW post that triggered an outpouring of pain entitled *Leaving A Sexless Marriage*. That post engendered over 150 comments, from both husbands and wives. Reading through those comments is not a happy task, but I would challenge you to do so. It will help to open your eyes to the magnitude of pain that sexlessness causes, and just how corrosive it is to the heart. [both links are below]

Be Careful What You Wish For....

You know what kills me in all of this? The number of women who have written to say that they wish that their husbands would somehow lose their libido, that their desire for sex would disappear and would just leave them alone! Guess what? It happens! But it's not pretty when it does.

Recently, in one week's time, I read the admissions of two different men who tell of no longer desiring their wives. One of them is still experiencing refusal, but he has stopped

initiating, and is resorting to stimulation to obtain release. His statement was that he no longer desires to have sex with his wife. Okay, she's got her wish. But at what cost to her marriage?

The other man tells of his wife being convicted [for non-Christians, "having her conscience struck"] for her refusal and seeing that her 20+ years of denying her husband was wrong. She now wants to make her marriage what God intended it to be, but a new problem has arisen. He says that now, he can't even get an erection thinking of sex with his wife, and that he has no desire for her sexually.

What kind of odds would you give me if I were to say that I am not sanguine about the futures of these two marriages? Several years ago, I heard a marriage podcaster make the statement, "*You're not going to have sex with someone you're not talking to,*" telling husbands that communication with their wives was a key to establishing a healthy sex life. Here's the thing, though; the inverse of that statement is also true:

Husbands are not going to talk to wives who aren't having sex with them!

Most men need to have a sexual relationship with their wives to feel loved and to love. Without it, without this sexual connection, there is no emotional connection, and love dies. For some reason, though, sex becomes a luxury item that isn't necessary, that can be jettisoned because, well, because. "*I don't need it. And if I don't need it, neither do you.*"

What is it Proverbs says? "*The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.*" (14:1) So brick by brick, with every "No" by "Not tonight," with every "Maybe tomorrow" by "You're an addict", unknowingly, these wives are destroying their relationships with their husbands and bringing closer the day when they will say "Goodbye."

Lost Toys, Lost Joys

As I said, above, thankfully there are many stories of marriages in which refusal is recognized and repented of, and marital restoration is achieved. I celebrate those stories and rejoice in those couples who have rediscovered God's joy in marriage. Unfortunately, however, there are husbands for whom past refusal and rejection have been so damaging that, while forgiveness is possible (we *are* Christian, after all), restoration of the marriage isn't.

Every couple is different, and every situation is unique. Different husbands will react differently to the pain and hurt that years of crushing rejection and refusal have created; some will be able to find the wherewithal within themselves to overcome the damage of refusal and be able to re-engage with a repentant wife seeking to restore their relationship. Unfortunately, others will find that they are too damaged to reconnect; they may forgive, but the pain may be just too great to continue in the marriage. I have

read of husbands reacting with anger: “*All these years and now you can change? What was stopping you before?*”

I’ve made this statement before, on my blog, and I’ll say it again: I’m not going to condemn these husbands for these types of responses. I’m not going to celebrate their responses, but because I don’t know the pain that they have suffered, “*neither do I condemn you.*”

I do ask this, however, guys. If you are in situations that have the potential to take you down such a path, stop now. Instead, start the process of re-engaging in your marriage by doing the work you need to do for yourself and your marriage. To help you do so, I have created two .pdfs for downloading that will help you think about how to begin [see links below].

Okay, it may get ugly; I’ve mentioned the guy who said that the two hardest years of his marriage were the years AFTER he started to change his marriage. But his marriage did change.

If, God willing, any wives wander into this blog and make it this far, ask yourself if your husband could be someone I’m describing in this post. On her Facebook feed, Chris Taylor, posted this message:

*Is your husband considering leaving your sexless marriage?
End the sexlessness, not the marriage.*

If you see that your Hubs could be one of these voices, hie thee over to *Forgiven Wife* and/or *Bonny’s Oyster Bed*7, ASAP.

CSL

Chris Taylor, *Forgiven Wife. Understanding Your Husband’s Hurt*:
<http://forgivenwife.com/new-to-this-blog-start-here/understanding-your-husbands-hurt/>

Chris Taylor. *Leaving a Sexless Marriage*: <http://forgivenwife.com/leaving-a-sexless-marriage/>

CSL, *Addressing the Sexless Marriage* .pdf: <https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/addressing.pdf>

CSL, *Waiting and Working* .pdf: <https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/addressing.pdf>

*Bonny’s Oysterbed*7: <http://www.oysterbed7.com/>

Chapter 2: Marital Gnosticism?

Christianity has always had a problem with heresies and bad teachings, and as I have pointed out in my *Bad Teaching* .pdf (see link below), many of these deal with marriage and sexuality. One early Christian heresy that has continued to plague the church was *Gnosticism*. Despite Paul condemning an early version of Gnosticism in his letters to the Galatians and Colossians, versions of the heresy were brought into the church, sanctified by teachers and continue in some form or other to this day. And for some of my readers, a version of Gnosticism may be affecting your marriage.

What Is Gnosticism?

As a cultic offshoot of Christianity, Gnosticism had two distinctive teachings that set it apart from orthodox Christianity. The first, which is really no longer a problem is the idea that salvation came with learning and receiving a secret knowledge, a *gnosis*, that brought the learner into a deeper, more special relationship with the truth and with God. This aspect of Gnosticism really isn't a problem today.

The second feature of Gnosticism, which set it apart and became an identifying tenet, was a dualistic view of man and nature. According to Gnosticism, the only part of man that mattered was the spirit; the flesh and nature were evil and corrupt. This belief in the imperfection of the flesh and the perfection of the spirit manifested itself in two different attitudes and behaviors, which were actually opposite of each other.

One response of dualistic Gnosticism was to teach that the flesh was, (you should pardon the pun), immaterial, and that whatever a person did, physically, didn't matter. Since only the spiritual mattered, what occurred in the physical was inconsequential; only the purity of the soul was important. This enabled some gnostics to teach that it didn't matter if you sinned or didn't sin in the body; you could rest in knowing that your soul was pure, no matter what you did physically. Hence, the result, for some strains of gnosticism, was to excuse a "*Party on, Dude*" hedonism.

The second response was an ascetic one: since the flesh was corrupt and only the spirit was pure, physical defilement was to be shunned, so that the soul could remain pure. This became the dominant reaction in the Church, leading to monastic hermits and celibate clergy. The leading lights of the Church began to teach that sex was the original sin, even to the ridiculous teaching, via Augustine, that *Original Sin* is carried in semen. This was why Christ had to be born of a virgin; a sexless conception meant no semen and no *Original Sin*.

Through the likes of Augustine and Jerome, the Church began to teach that, while sex was a necessary evil for married Christians to engage in, sexlessness was the better state. The Church even began to teach that virgins and celibates were a higher class of

Christian, that they were more Christ-like and more worthy of God's blessings; priests, monks, nuns and celibates were viewed as first-class Christians, separate from the run-of-the-mill variety of Christians.

Are You Married To A Marital Gnostic?

Just as Gnostics believed that the body and body-related matters are of secondary importance, so, too, do the *Marital Gnostics* (MGs). Well, maybe not everything. After all, they are very solicitous about the physical health and well-being of their children, and may be just as mindful of their own health and fitness. But as to the physical nature of their marriages? Not so much.

It is as if, for the *MGs*, marriage is a separate entity apart from each spouse; a third party, if you will, an entity with its own life and needs, for which physical needs don't exist. To the *MGs*, the only aspect of marriage that matters is the spiritual; in fact, to the *MGs*, sexuality may even be a negative force in the marriage, just as it became so to the Church.

So, how do you tell if you are married to a *MGs*? Gnosticism and *Marital Gnosticism* share similar concepts and assumptions, so let's take a look at possible indicators.

Spirituality is consequential, the physical is not

Gnosticism believed that only that which is spiritual is real and of consequence, and that which is physical is not. For Gnostics, denial of physical needs is an approach to godliness and relationship with the Spirit. To a Gnostic, God is not experienced in the natural world (having no truck with it), but only in ethereal pursuits.

For the *MGs*, marriage about companionship and emotional connection; sex is "just sex." The refused spouse is constantly informed that sex, while it may be nice, isn't needed in a marriage or in a relationship. Companionship and fellowship, these are what make a marriage! After all, marriage is for holiness, not happiness!

Spirituality confers a superior status; physical concerns demonstrate spiritual failure.

According to the belief of Gnosticism, being spiritual conferred a superior status in the Church, and confirmed a sense of superiority. To be concerned about the matters of the flesh means that you are '*carnal*' and do not have your mind on the things of the Spirit; of course, this serves to confirm the carnal believer's second-class status as a Christian.

Marital Gnostics, of course, also see marriage as a spiritual entity, and those who see marriage as melding of two hearts are superior to those who believe that marital relationships should include a 'one flesh' aspect. After all, we are told, marriage is the earthly representation of the relationship between Christ and the Church, and it is a spiritual relationship.

“It’s not about you! (hmmm, it’s about me)”

Paul tells us that the Gnostic heresy seemed to be godly, seemed to be holy, because of its aestheticism. In Col. 2:23, he wrote:

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body,...

This aesthetic bent presents a facade of holiness, even preaches a desire for holiness, but at the expense of denying God’s creation as evil. What God has pronounced as “Good,” Gnostics call evil. That which God has given as blessing is spurned as a bane.

A *MG* does the same, telling his/her spouse that sex just isn’t that necessary in a marriage, that it might even be a detriment; after all, it has become a point of contention between us, right? There may be any number of reasons why sex isn’t all that important or necessary, but a *MG*’s argumentation rests on the bedrock that, “*Honey, our marriage is fine; we don’t need sex. Just don’t think about sex and it won’t matter.*” In other words, “*it’s not about you, it’s about our marriage.*”

(But isn’t it funny that “*it’s not about you and your sex drive*” somehow transforms itself into “*it is about me and my not-sex drive*”? Convenient, huh?)

Is There a Remedy For Marital Gnosticism?

I acknowledge that I can be pretty cynical. Not only do I believe that the proverbial glass is half empty, I’m pretty sure someone drank from it first. But I’m Christian enough to believe that God’s Word is the remedy for pretty much everything.

Now, I’ve read statements from different women who have been refusers in the past and who now see that how they did marriage before was wrong, and acknowledge that what they did was against the Bible. But they still seem to discount the efficacy of the Bible. These women have said that trying to change them by beating them over the head with scripture would not have been well-received. One idea that seems to be expressed frequently is that they feel that they “weren’t in a place where they could receive it.”

That may be true. But the thought comes niggling at the edges of my mind: Paul didn’t wait until the Gnostics were ready to receive his words, did he? He just wrote the truth. Scripture is true, whether I want to believe it or not, isn’t it? Whether I’m ready to receive it or not, right? So, if I, a Christian, am confronted with the truth from the scriptures, I can either take it to heart or turn my back on my faith. And if my commitment to my libido-less state means more to me than my commitment to God and His word, then I’m not really a Christian, am I? Jes’ sayin’.

I know, there’s going to be push-back here. “*After all, CSL, you can’t just lord it over your wife and expect her to be happy about it, right?*” Yeah, you’re right.

But then, I'm not saying that what the refused spouse should do is say, "*The Bible says you are supposed to do me or you're a sinner.*" No, that won't fly. But the truth is the truth, nonetheless. You can arm yourself with the truth, and work from that place of knowledge, so that when *marital gnostic* ideas are thrown up against you, you can destroy the faulty reasoning behind them.

Paul wrote of "*destroying arguments and opinions raised against the knowledge of God,*" in 2 Cor. 10:5. We also know that one of the functions of scripture is correction (2 Tim. 3:16). Scriptures are capable of the correction of personal conduct, of personal character, and of biblical error, and *Marital Gnosticism* is as much an error as any other heresy.

There is one caveat in all this: You say that your wife is a Christian, but I would ask you if she is a *Notionalist* christian or a *Creedalist* christian. A *creedalist*, as I understand the term, actually believes what they say they believe, and tries to live by it. A *notionalist* is one who says that christianity is a nice idea, but it doesn't let it impinge upon their life to any meaningful degree. In essence, is your wife's faith a *conviction* or a *preference*?

The caveat is this: if you realize that your wife is a *notionalist*, it isn't going to matter what the Bible teaches, and this is all moot.

If your wife is a *creedalist*, then knowing the teachings of the Bible on marriage and presenting them over time should be enough to reach your wife. As I said above, I do not advocate marching up to your wife and saying "*The Bible says you've got to do me.*" Nope.

But what I do suggest is that you present your wives with the series by Bonny Burns, of *Bonny's Oysterbed7*, on the *59 One Another* series she has written. [see link below]

Yes, bloggers say "Don't beat your wives with the Bible, but the fact remains, God created marriage to include a sexual component, and what the *MG* dismisses, God called "Good." You should be able to say so, too.

CSL

Links:

Bonny Burns, *59 One Another Passages*: <https://www.oysterbed7.com/team-work-makes-the-dream-work-and-how-the-59-one-another-bible-passages-can-help-your-sex-life/>

CSL, *BadTeachings* pdf: <https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/free-downloads/>

Chapter 3: Are You Married to a Sex Skeptic?

Many years ago, I made the following observation: Sermonizing is the sin of the deadly earnest, no matter what theological colors you may be wearing. As I have aged, all that I've observed of the world around me convinces me that I was wonderfully prescient back then.

For example, if your theology is Global Warming, then you come at the debate with the fervor of an Al Gore, demanding that anyone who disagrees with you be locked up or sent to re-education camps. And if your theology is abortion, then "*By Billy Bedamned Hangtree, keep your laws off my body! Sorry, Kiddo, it sucks to be you 'cause Mama wants to shake her groove thang!*"

And if you are a marriage blogger like me, there is a good chance that you might, just might, mount your personal soapbox and get a little too fervorous in your denunciation of refusers and gatekeepers and anyone who is less than a true believer in the importance of sex in marriage.

Having acknowledged that, in this chapter, I do want to talk about the Loyal Opposition, (deniers and skeptics), *sans* torch and pitchfork, *sans* tar and feathers. If you are familiar with the Global Warming/Global Change debate, then you are familiar with the terms *climate denier* and *climate skeptic*. In this post I want to address the problem of Sex Skeptics™.

Condescending Buts

What is a Sex Skeptic™? My definition of a Sex Skeptic™ would include anyone who can't bring themselves to come alongside the statement that God made sex as a gift to marriage, for both partners, with a hearty "Amen." I would accept the accusation that I can get a little fervorous over the proposition, but I don't think that you can pare too much off of that simple definition, that sex was created by God and that God said, "*It is good*" when he made Adam and Eve. If you can, you're a Sex Skeptic™.

How can you tell if you are talking to a Sex Skeptic™, or if you are reading something written by a Sex Skeptic™? Is there something that gives their true nature away, that reveals that, in their heart of hearts, they know God didn't mean it when He said, "*It is good*"? Yes, there is. You can always identify Sex Skeptic™ by their *condescending butts*. Please note the single-T but, that I didn't say "butt"; I'm not referring to any body parts, nor am I calling names here (although I am sometimes sorely tempted). By using the phrase *condescending but*, I'm referring to the bemused belittling of sex, denying its importance to marriage.

The Condescending But In Action

“Sex is nice... BUT it’s just the frosting on the cake.”

Yes, it’s true that a man won’t die for the lack of cake, but when you tell a man that his physical drive and desire for emotional connection via intimacy is just a bonus and not a necessary part of the marriage, you tell him that his needs are superfluous to his marriage and relationship with his wife.

“Sex is nice... BUT sex is just one aspect of marriage.”

True, but so is talking. So is fatherhood and motherhood. So is providing emotional safety. So is working to provide for your family. All of these are single aspects of marriage, so why do people see sexual intimacy as the one “aspect” of marriage that can be diminished without harming the marriage? Why not diminish parenting or providing, or even talking and communicating? We’re never told, “You know, parenting is overrated,” or “Communication is just one aspect of marriage.”

“Sex is nice... BUT sex isn’t really all that important to a relationship.”

Well, if you are talking about best friends, I should hope not! But if it’s not that important, then why do we get so upset about infidelity, then? I certainly don’t condone adultery, but what would be the reaction of these Sex Skeptic™ to the suggestion that, since sex isn’t that important to a marriage, then instances of infidelity are no big deal?

“After all, it’s not like there is a real relationship in a “friends with benefits” arrangement, so long as I’m back at home when the day ends, right? After all, “it’s just sex”, and surely is meaningless, right?”

For some reason, if the thought of infidelity is mentioned, sex is downright important to the relationship. As in, *“I don’t care if we aren’t having sex, but you’d better not be having sex elsewhere!”*

“Men Just Don’t Get This!”

Some time ago, Chris Taylor of *Forgiven Wife* began a post [link below]:

My Facebook feed recently had a meme that said, “Physical intimacy isn’t and can never be an effective substitute for emotional intimacy,” and a woman made the comment, “Men just don’t get this!”

I realize that having a Facebook page means that you open yourself up to a deluge of tripe and trope from your ‘friends’ that is capable of inducing a sugar coma. While I haven’t seen the particular specimen that Chris describes, I’m willing to accept that *“Men Don’t Get It”* is a decent representative of that subset of tropes devoted to the *Superiority of the Sisterhood*; I see this kind of material all the time from a few of my relatives. It’s just the nature of the beast.

But being so marvelously unself-aware has its benefits, I guess. After all, it keeps you from seeing that the opposite is true, as well; women just don't get this, either. It seems that women are just as capable of proclaiming right along with Prof. Henry Higgins, "*By and large, we are a marvelous sex!*"

True, all too often, men DON'T get the emotional connection women get through heart-to-heart communication. As a card-carrying guy, while I enjoy our language, sometimes I am not all that keen on doing a lot of talking. By the same token, women, as a rule, don't get the emotional connection that sex creates in husbands with their wives. They just don't.

But I'm Wrong

Yes, I'm wrong. That was a blanket statement I just made, and blanket statements, like *all* and *never* statements, are pretty much useless. And that woman commenter that Chris quoted? She was wrong, too; she made a blanket statement, as well, saying that *men just don't get it*. Here's why: some men, even many men, get it. Some women, even many women, get it.

How many times have you heard or read "Never say never or always, because you'll always be wrong!" Absolute statements ARE wrong (absolutely!), and if a husband or a wife says, "You always....." or "You never....", it's going to be a false statement. So saying that all men or all women *don't get it* is just so much bovine effluvia.

Now, mind you, there is always a truth behind an archetype; I definitely believe in archetypes. The accepted societal notion that men want sex more than women has statistical support for it. But that doesn't discount the fact that in up to 40% of all sexless marriages, it is the wife who has the higher sex drive and is the one being refused. The societal belief that it is women who want to connect emotionally and that men are distant doesn't mean that men don't want to connect with their wives; it just means that we don't recognize that most men connect through sexual intimacy.

What Is It We Don't Get?

It's not that men don't get the importance of emotional connection or that women don't get the importance of sexual connection. What most of us don't get is that we are seeing connection through our own lenses, through our own wants and needs. We aren't giving consideration to the fact that The Other is other than you.

Last year, *Forgiven Wife* had an excellent and insightful post asking wives "*Should Your Husband's Sexuality Be Like Yours?*" In the beginning of the piece, she wrote:

Embracing our sexuality means that we recognize and appreciate our sexual response for what it is. We need to reject the idea that a male paradigm should apply to us.

There's a flip side to that: we also need to reject the idea that a female paradigm should apply to our husbands.

In her post, Chris does a great job in cataloging how male sexuality is different from female sexuality, and lets her readers know that it's okay, that God DIDN'T go, "Oops", after making man and so tried to perfect the species with Eve.

And guys, there are things that we don't get about female sexuality, such as turn-ons. I could try to emulate Chris and attempt to catalog how female sexual response is different from ours, but many writers and bloggers have done so already. However, in a YouTube video *Why Women Are Different From Men*, Amanda Gore does it humorously, bluntly, and, oh, so succinctly, so pay attention! (If you get nothing else from this post, get this and tattoo it somewhere: No Boob Honks!!)

Gore is only right; as men, we're all about "the bits." Women, not so much. In fact, guys, take a lesson from that renowned sexologist, Monica Geller, and learn the importance of all Seven Erogeous Zones, also on YouTube.

By the way, did you catch what I did there? I went with verbal communication for women, and visual communication for men. It's not that one mode of communication is right and the other is wrong; it's just us. Like Chris said at the end of her post:

Learn to understand your husband's sexuality and sexual response, and learn to see it as part of God's design for your marriage.

And the same goes for communication. So guys, if you will be willing to not be a Connection Skeptic, maybe you can get through to the Sex Skeptic™ in your life.

CSL

Chris Taylor, *Forgiven Wife*:

Your Emotional Need: <http://forgivenwife.com/your-emotional-need/>

Love Your Man: <http://forgivenwife.com/love-your-man/>

Chapter 4: Smack Dab In The Muddle

Many of the authors and bloggers I read make it a point to emphasize *generosity* and *good-will*. Two of my favorite bloggers are Paul and Lori Byerly, authors of the *Generous Husband* and *Generous Wife* blogs (I read them every morning, without fail.) Another example would be Emerson Eggerichs, author of *Love & Respect*, who peppers his writings with statements on how most spouses are not evil jerks and witches, but truly do have good-will for their mates (a statement with which I agree, by the way).

In the second chapter of *L&R*, Eggerichs sets up the premise for his book (the problem of gender-based miscommunication) by telling the story of one couple's disastrous anniversary dinner. He tells us that the couple in this parable are "good-willed", and then proceeded to explain what this means.

What do I mean by "good-willed people"? Simply that both of these people love each other a great deal. They do not mean real harm; they do not intend real evil toward one another. They are hurt and angry, but they still care deeply for one another. That is why they spent their anniversary evening in separate rooms, miserable, wondering how this whole stupid thing could have happened. (And the reason neither will never figure it out is that each blames the other for the whole sordid affair.)

As I said, I was very impressed by the insights of *L&R* and by the writing ministry of the Byerlys, but as regular readers of this blog know, I am more than adept at winkling at the edges of topics, and wondering about contrary questions. And in this case, I'm wondering if there isn't a fly in the ointment;

what point do we have to reach before good-will or generosity can no longer be assumed?

It seems to me that automatic assumption of generosity and good-will can be problematic.

I think that it is safe to assume that there are marriages out there in which one might find that either one or both partners no longer have good-will, but instead harbor true bad-will for the other. It might be anger, contempt, disappointment, or a whole slew of other feelings. And given that the topic of toxic marriage is a 'thing' (over 70 million hits on Bing), I don't think that there can be any gainsaying that statement.

In The Arms of Sweet Indifference

Given that I don't believe that anyone stands at the altar and says in their heart, "*Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war!*", I have to assume that there is a progression from

generosity and good-will to selfishness and bad-will. And I think that there is a space, a wide space, in between the two where many marriages go. Now, I don't believe that all marriages make the whole journey to toxic, but I think it quite likely that many make it to this halfway station, becoming bogged down in what I call the *Indifferent Muddle*.

There was a popular song when I was a new Christian that had a catchy chorus, and like any self-respecting music lover, I will catch an earworm and start singing tunes that I can't get out of my head. And so it was one day that I was shelving books in my library and was humming *In The Arms Of Sweet Deliverance*. [search for it on YouTube] I have an unfortunate propensity for wordplay that can kick in unbidden, at a moment's notice, and so I surprised myself by singing "In the arms of sweet indifference...." *Sweet Indifference???*

And this mental skipping of a groove that I experienced created the perfect description of the climate of a marriage bogged down in the Indifferent Muddle. Do any of these sound familiar?

- "We're roommates."
- "We're good friends."
- "We never talk about anything other than work, kids or finance."
- "Sex? Infrequent (Never?) and it's *meh* when we do."
- "He/She/We never have energy to do anything anymore."
- "We get along fine."
- "We don't have time for each other because the kids' activities keep us busy."

If you can find yourself agreeing with these and/or many more tepid statements about your marriage, I've got a newsflash for you—you're in the middle of a marriage muddle. There's a saying that familiarity breeds contempt, but I'm pretty sure that before contempt is reached, familiarity breeds indifference.

To go from generous to contemptuous, I think you have to pass through the arms of sweet indifference.

I refer to this place as the *Indifferent Muddle*. In the *Indifferent Muddle*, husband and wife plod through their married life with a growing indifference in how they live in their marriages, since the marriage is carried on by rote. Oh, if asked, each will say, "I love my husband/wife!", but maybe, if pressed about desire and attraction for their spouse, they will agree with the old Amish saying, "Cooking lasts." Passion, however? E-e-eh, not so much.

This might go on for years, but a time may come when a husband or wife lifts a head and looks around. Taking stock of what the marriage has become, s/he realizes that the marriage has drifted into the murky fog that is the *Indifferent Muddle*. So, what to do?

Without adding to the multitude of “*5 Ways to Perk Up Your Marriage*” genre of marriage advice, I believe that there are a few things that need to be done in attempting to leave the *Muddle*.

“*Lift Up Your Eyes*”

The fourth chapter of John’s gospel records an odd exchange between Jesus and His disciples. The elephant in the room is that when the disciples returned from the nearby village, they found Jesus, their rabbi, talking to a woman. A foreign woman! No self-respecting, Jewish rabbi would be caught dead doing such a thing!

They proceed to ignore the one thing that is on everyone’s mind, and instead open with, “Let’s eat.” But Jesus doesn’t let them off the hook; He immediately goes THERE – “*The old saying is ‘four months to harvest’, but look around you,*” He says, “*the field is already ripe for harvesting!*” Jesus brushes aside the disciples’ *how-bout-dem-Bears* attempt at diversion and addresses the bigger need, the fact that people need saving.

I’m going to tell you the same thing: Lift up your eyes to your marriage; look beyond this week’s appointment calendar or to-do list, the new sales campaign at work, or coming up with a savings schedule for Junior’s college fund. Those are all well and good, but if you are in the middle of a *meh* marriage, you need to take stock of your situation.

And do it NOW. Note in John 4, Jesus mentions how workers would say, “*four months from now*”; instead of kicking the can down the road, Jesus is saying that the important issue is at hand, not something that can be corrected when time permits. So, “lift up your eyes”, TODAY.

“Do What You Did At First”

The church was doing a great job. The members of the church were known for their good works throughout the community, and unlike many modern churches which compromise truth for “relevance”, the teaching in this church was biblically sound, upholding the gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. There was no compromise in this congregation.

And yet, something was off. Most pastors would have given their right arms for the success that that church had achieved, but at the core of this church, something was missing. This something was so important that Jesus had John the Revelator send them a personal message. After noting their praise-worthy accomplishments as a church, He says to them:

But I have this against you: You have abandoned your first love. (Rev. 2.4)

“*Ephesus, you’re doing great work, But remember Me? I’m why you even have church.*” Ephesus had a zeal for truth, had a zeal for people, had a zeal for their mission.

But in all this zeal, they forgot one thing. The main thing, as it turned out. Like Mary and Joseph, they left without Jesus! The fact that religious organizations keep going long after God has done an Ichabod on them (Ezek. 10:18) doesn't surprise us. But we should also recognize that marriages can continue on long after love has departed.

But here's the good news: this love can be restored. Jesus Himself, in speaking to the Ephesian church, gives the remedy:

... remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first;
(Rev. 2:5)

While it may seem trite, John's message was a simple one: remember what you did in the beginning, when you truly loved the Lord? Go back and start doing those things again.

DO—Some of the biggest words in the English language are extremely small, and in Rev. 2:5, the two-letter word *do* is extremely important. Jesus' message to Ephesus wasn't to try to feel like you're in love again, but to **DO** the things that you did before when you were in love.

Fifteen years ago, when Wife and I felt the need to find a new church, we were confronted by a word that we had never before heard applied to the Christian faith: *Intentionality*.

"Well, of course, we're intentional," we reasoned, *"we received Christ and we live like Christians should, reading the Bible, praying, going to church."* You know, the whole Christian bit.

But this new church challenged us with a new thought, that of being intentional about our Christian growth and maturity. After all, the pastor reasoned, if you truly want something, you plan for it, whether it is saving for a vacation or taking classes to improve your job skills, or even exercising to lose weight or get fit. "You don't just wait for these things to happen," he told us, "you figure out what you need to do to achieve your goal, create a plan, and start working your plan."

He applied this truism to our faith, our Christian lives. If we know that there are certain activities that will help us grow spiritually, we need to make plans to engage in those activities to be intentional in drawing nearer to God.

The Way Out of the Muddle?

Well, what if our goal is a good marriage, a caring, generous relationship with our spouses? Shouldn't we be intentional in that area, as well? In His message to the Ephesian church, Jesus seemed to be saying that they should be intentional in returning to their first love; maybe we should, too.

There is an old story about a man and wife driving in their car, back in the day of the bench front seats. At a stop light, the woman looks at the car ahead of them and notices, through the rear window, that the girl is snuggled up to the guy, her head on his shoulder and his arm around her. She says to her husband, “Look at that! That used to be us 30 years ago!”

The man looked at the steering wheel in his hands and then said to his wife, “I haven’t moved.”

Getting into the *Indifferent Muddle* is easy—all you have to do is drift. Getting out sounds simple, even trite:

- Remember what you were like
- Purpose to return to that love
- Be intentional in doing the things that build that love.

Simple, yes. But easy? No. You can’t drift out of the *Muddle*, you have to be intentional.

CSL

Paul Byerly, *The Generous Husband*: <https://www.the-generous-husband.com/>

Lori Byerly, *The Generous Wife*: <https://www.the-generous-wife.com/>

Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect*: https://www.amazon.com/Love-Respect-Desires-Desperately-Needs/dp/1591451876/ref=sr_1_1_tw_i_har_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1501686848&sr=8-1&keywords=love+%26+respect+by+dr.+emerson+eggerichs

Chapter 5: “... and the Ugly”: part 1

In the previous chapter, I referenced Emerson Eggerichs’ *Love & Respect*, a book I recommend highly. I mentioned how he and the Byerlys, of *Generous Husband* and *Generous Wife*, speak of good-willed spouses, husbands and wives who do have goodwill in their hearts toward each other. I discussed that, unfortunately, not all marriages have spouses who are still good-willed, hence the *Indifferent Muddle*.

I tend to see things as being on a continuum instead of terms of black and white, and marriages are no exception. As I’ve been thinking about all of this, I see the marriage continuum as resembling this little graphic:



Having dealt with the *Muddle*, I want to address those marriages that have moved from generous good-will, past the *Muddle* into, erm, well..., for want of a better word, *Hades*.

As I said, I highly recommend Eggerichs’ *L&R*; that being said, I think it does have one weakness. The book is directed toward “good-willed” marriages; not that this is a crime, mind you, but he freely admits that the husbands and wives that he writes about, those having communication difficulties, are still in love with each other and want to have great marriages together. These marriages aren’t really “on the rocks”; as Eggerichs points out, neither husband or wife hates or even dislikes the other, but through hurt and misunderstanding have come to a rocky place in their marriage.

But he realizes that his audience isn’t in Hades.

The Fly In The Ointment

Okay, it’s time to “tell the truth and shame the devil,” as the old saying goes. None of us are ever keen on airing dirty laundry in public, and we in the church are among the world’s best when it comes to avoiding uncomfortable truths and topics. We can mumble, harrumph, and mouth pious platitudes with the best that the world has to offer

when it comes to avoiding the ugly truths we don't want to talk about. But we all know that, despite all our preaching about the blessedness of marriage, we have our own dirty little secret, that there are some "christian" marriages that aren't so much "made in heaven" as they are spawned in Hades.

I have mentioned on my blog that I have been participating and posting in a non-Christian forum, and I am reading of situations in which all traces of good-will and generosity are gone. I'm talking about marriages where name-calling, disrespect and animosity aren't just occurrences, but an entire way of life. But here's what's killing me; I'm also reading of similar marriages on christian marriage fora.

It's heartbreaking. As I say in my disclaimer, marriage isn't supposed to hurt.

I am not the only person reading/dealing with people who are in *Hades*-type marriages. Recently, Paul Byerly/*Generous Husband*, wrote a blog post that, for him, was quite unusual; it was entitled *My Nightmare Marriage*. Don't let the title throw you; when he says "nightmare", he meant an actual "nightmare," as in a bad dream he experienced. In the comments section of his post, I asked if he knew what might have triggered such a bad dream, and he told of trying to help people who were in such marriages, in recent months; he thought it might have caused his dream.

Both Paul and I write for christian audiences, and so these nightmarish, *Hades* marriages that we come in contact with are "christian" marriages. We understand that the world gets marriage and sexuality wrong, and so we're not surprised when non-christian marriages go south, but the truth that the church tries to ignore is that christian marriages go south, too. And people are hurting because of our desire to hide the, oh so *ugly*.

"Invested Selfishness"

In writing about the *Indifferent Muddle*, I spoke about marital drift. I said that no one *intends* to direct their marriage into the *Muddle*, but through indifference, care-lessness (note the hyphen), and what I call "casual selfishness," marriages end up in the backwaters and eddies that are the *Muddle*.

Care-lessness? – yes, not having a care, just drifting. Not being intentional in working on the marriage.

Casual selfishness? – yes, not intending to take from your spouse, but making choices that add up to "*Me uber alles*."

But then there is *Invested Selfishness*, where one intentionally looks out for #1. For this person, marriage has become a life-enhancement accessory for personal comfort.

There is no way I could begin to provide a catalog of the different methods by which those invested in their personal selfishness work to create a *Hades*. Oh, I could try to come up with different character types, such as the *Shrew* or the *Man-Child*, the *Terrorist* or the *Princess*, to try to categorize the different ways by which a spouse makes a home a Hell, but again, I would run the danger of leaving your particular sin off the list. Instead, I think that a better indicator for judging your marriage is simply your reaction to being in your own home.

Decades ago, I heard a minister say that Christians are ambassadors of Christ's kingdom here on earth, and that a christian home is like an embassy of heaven. Recently, I discovered that the ancient sages of Judaism had the same idea. According to them, the home is a little *mishkin*, a miniature Temple on earth, where God resides. From these two ideas, I've had the idea that a proper christian or jewish home should be a sanctuary, a place where the stresses of the world can't enter and where God's peace and love abides. For me, leaving work every day and driving about twenty miles to my home was just that. Entering my home at the end of a workday was pure heaven for me.

Contrast that to someone whose home is a *Hades*. In my reading, I've come across such statements as:

- *"I have to take Tums in order to enter my house."*
- *"Lately, I realized that I started driving slower as I neared our home. Apparently, my subconscious mind didn't want me to arrive."*
- *"I'm spending more time at work or at the gym in order to spend less time at home."*
- *"I find that the best part of my life is when my wife has to travel on business. Is that wrong?"*

I realize that, as Christians, we are expected to put on our "I'm blessed" face for the world and make like everything is just peachy-keen, but be honest with yourself: can you identify with any of the above statements? Or maybe you have your own version of these aversion statements? Plain and simple, if your home is not your sanctuary from the world, where do you see yourself on my *Marriage Continuum*?

In the previous chapter, I gave some suggestions for trying to move your marriage from the slough of the *Muddle* back onto the road of a good marriage. In the next chapter, I want to piggy-back on some ideas that Paul B. made in HIS follow-up post, and resurrect some of my old posts that can help someone dealing with a *Hades* in their home.

CSL

Paul Byerly, *The Generous Husband*: <https://www.the-generous-husband.com/>
My Nightmare Marriage: <https://www.the-generous-husband.com/2017/08/16/my-nightmare-marriage/>

Lori Byerly, *The Generous Wife*: <https://www.the-generous-wife.com/>

Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect*: [https://www.amazon.com/Love-Respect-Desires-Desperately-Needs/dp/1591451876/ref=sr_1_1_twi_har_2?](https://www.amazon.com/Love-Respect-Desires-Desperately-Needs/dp/1591451876/ref=sr_1_1_twi_har_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1501686848&sr=8-1&keywords=love+%26+respect+by+dr.+emerson+eggerichs)

[ie=UTF8&qid=1501686848&sr=8-1&keywords=love+%26+respect+by+dr.+emerson+eggerichs](https://www.amazon.com/Love-Respect-Desires-Desperately-Needs/dp/1591451876/ref=sr_1_1_twi_har_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1501686848&sr=8-1&keywords=love+%26+respect+by+dr.+emerson+eggerichs)

Chapter 6: “... and the Ugly”: part 2

(Note: in this chapter, I write as addressing husbands who find themselves in Hades-marriages. However, Paul Byerly's suggestions and my comments and suggestions apply to any wife who finds herself in the same situation.)

In the previous chapter, I wrote about how Paul Byerly, of *Generous Husband*, told of experiencing an unsettling nightmare, in which he dreamt of being trapped in a *Hades*-marriage. His next post told of his thoughts on how he would attempt to deal with the situation if he were in one.

In his article, *Dealing With A Nightmare Marriage* [see link below], Paul presented several suggestions for husbands and wives in a *Hades*-marriage, and I want to go over his suggestions and share with you different resources from *Curmudgeonly Librarian* that will help you with his ideas.

Suggestion #1: *First and foremost I would need a solid relationship with the Lord.*

Sweet Lord, yes! All too often, we christians make an idol out of our marriages and get our lives out of balance. We have to be reminded that our husbands, our wives, and our marriages aren't God; God is God, and when we let our situations take our eyes off of God, we can't be right. Just as ancient sailors needed a North Star to navigate on seas, we need a North Star in our lives to help us know where we are.

I ended my *Waiting #1* post [see link below] with this recommendation:

Realize that what you have received and believed is a lie, and go to God to do a mental and spiritual reset.

I'm going to recommend that you read Paul Coughlin's *No More Christian Nice Guy*. While a bit of a bombast, Coughlin writes with a guy-in-the-pew perspective that lets you know that being a guy doesn't mean that you're automatically toxic, and that it's okay to have wants and needs in your marriage. To my mind, the title of the second chapter is worth the price of the book: *Jesus, the Bearded Woman!* And for wives in a *Hades* marriage, just so you know, Coughlin didn't leave you out, but has also written *No More Christian Nice Girl*. [Paul Coughlin links are listed below.]

Suggestion #2: *I would pray and try to figure out what my reasonable responsibilities to my wife were.*

Paul B.'s first suggestion was to go to God and learn to rebuild yourself as a man of God. With this second suggestion, I see Paul as saying that you need to go to God to re-learn what marriage is supposed to be.

In my *Bad Teaching* series (linked below), I discussed how today's church has spawned a deformed version of the *Love Your Wife As Christ Loved the Church* teaching (LYWACLTC™) that has, in essence, devalued Christian men as men, glorifying self-abasing milquetoasts as *Servant-Leaders* instead. Yes, Christian husbands are to serve, but this is not the biblical position of a spouse, husband or wife!

Instead, when God created us male and female, He imbued us with an intrinsic value as humans, and "doormat" isn't part of the job description. Much has been written over the years about such problems in marriage as passive-aggressive relationships, narcissistic relationships, emotionally abusive relationships, *ad nauseum*. It's not my purpose to try to analyze all these possibilities and give solutions. One, I'm not a trained counselor, and two, I got nothin'.

But being the librarian that I am, I am not without resources. And as to the problem that Paul B. addresses, that of defining reasonable responsibilities? That problem comes from allowing your spouse to impose his/her responsibilities on you and you not learning to say "No" to those things that harm you and your marriage. The best resource for learning what constitutes your "reasonable responsibilities" is the book *Boundaries*, by Cloud and Townsend. [linked below]

One of the best things you can do for yourself and for your marriage is to learn to not feel guilty about things that aren't your responsibility. *Boundaries* is a must.

Suggestion #3: *Next, I would build a healthy life beyond my marriage. I wouldn't intentionally exclude her, but I wouldn't say no to things just because she wasn't interested.*

If you are in a *Hades*-marriage, there is no way that you have not been affected by what has transpired. Years Decades Years before, you stood at the altar promising to love, honor and cherish the person standing next to you. Today, however, the downward spiral of your marriage and relationship has affected every aspect of your life, spiritually,



mentally, emotionally and physically, and has sapped all joy of your vow from your being.

I've written about losing yourself in your relationship, being altered in such a way that you don't recognize yourself anymore. So I'm going to repeat the same thing I said in my *Waiting #6* post:

Find the guy you lost.

And, yes, I mean "lost". Many times, a husband will give up activities and avocations that he enjoyed for the sake of creating togetherness in a marriage.

...

[M]any times we guys will allow our interests to be subsumed into the marriage because they pull us away from the marriage. This is not a bad thing, as the marriage becomes the object, the focus of our lives, now. But the person who cycled or flew or studied the Benko Gambit until 1:00 in the morning should still be there, and not have been transmogrified into a mere marital factotum.

I've said it before: marriage changes us. There is no way two lives blending into one cannot change us. But understand this: there is a difference between growing together and one being subsumed into the other. In this third suggestion, Paul B. tells someone in a *Hades*-marriage to begin to disentangle him/herself from the brambles that seem to bind them from finding life in God.

Journey of Three Re-discoveries

Paul B.'s first three suggestions are a challenge to engage on a journey of re-discovery. You have known for sometime that your marriage is not what you envisioned, that it has somehow become something you never saw coming. Now you need to begin the process of re-discovering God, of re-discovering the truth about what marriage is supposed to be, and of re-discovering the man or woman who got lost over the life of your marriage. Paul's next two suggestions are action steps, not journeys of discovery, and I address them in the next chapter.

CSL

Resources:

Paul Byerly, *Dealing With A Nightmare Marriage*:
<https://www.the-generous-husband.com/2017/08/17/dealing-with-a-nightmare-marriage/>

CSL, *Waiting, Watching and Working #1*: <https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/10/09/waiting-watching-working-pt-1/>

CSL, *Waiting, Watching and Working* #6:

<https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/11/17/waiting-watching-working-pt-6/>

CSL, *Bad Teachings* series:

<https://wordpress.com/view/curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com>

Paul Coughlin, *No More Christian Nice Guy*: <https://www.amazon.com/More-Christian-Nice-Guy-Nice-Instead/dp/076420369X>

Paul Coughlin, *No More Christian Nice Girl*:

<https://www.amazon.com/More-Christian-Nice-Girl-Nice-Instead/dp/076420769>

Cloud & Townsend, *Boundaries*,:

<https://www.amazon.com/Boundaries-When-Take-Control-Your/dp/0310247454>

Chapter 7: “... and the Ugly.”: part 3

The two previous chapters addressed a dirty secret about marriage that we Christians don't like to talk about, that of truly *Ugly!* marriages which, rather than “made in Heaven,” seem to have been spawned in Hades. These marriages are an embarrassment to us because they mar the image that the church wants to promote, that of marriage as a union “blessed by God”.

The catalyst for these three chapters were a pair of entries on Paul Byerly's *Generous Husband* blog [linked above, ch. 5 & 6]. He told of having a nightmare that shook him emotionally, that of being trapped in a *Hades*-marriage, and presented his thoughts on how he would deal with his situation if he were in one. In the previous chapter, I went over the first three suggestions which dealt with learning to rediscover truths about yourself and God. In this chapter, I am going to address his further suggestions on how to address the situation that you are in.

Here are the first three of Paul B.'s suggestions dealing with self-discovery:

Suggestion #1: First and foremost I would need a solid relationship with the Lord.

Suggestion #2: I would pray and try to figure out what my reasonable responsibilities to my wife were.

Suggestion #3: Next, I would build a healthy life beyond my marriage. I wouldn't intentionally exclude her, but I wouldn't say no to things just because she wasn't interested.

And so, on to Paul's next...

Suggestion #4: As to sex, even if I still had a drive I would pull back. If she really wanted it I would feel a biblical obligation, but I wouldn't seek sex and I wouldn't jump on offers she made. If I still had a sex drive to deal with I'd take care of that in the shower as needed.

In ch. 5, I spoke of spouses approaching their homes with anxiety and trepidation. What does that say about a marriage when one of the two marriage participants dreads coming home? And what does it say about a relationship when a spouse, who would be good-willed, feels that to protect and heal him-/herself, they have to retreat from the marriage bed?

It is sad that that which is supposed to be unitive in a marriage now becomes a point where separation for the purpose of self-protection becomes necessary. Just as the home becomes a place of anxiety, so too the marriage bed becomes a place of avoidance.

I realize that for some of my readers, this decision to pull back from sex is moot, as they already are refused, so it isn't a big loss. I've already written about emotional and physical distancing, in a post entitled *Therapeutic Distancing*. But Paul B.'s suggestion hints at a danger in attempting to distance for healing, when he writes, *If she really wanted it I would feel a biblical obligation, but I wouldn't seek sex*

The danger is that distancing may lead to a cooling of ardor. Just as a single ember begins to lose heat and stop burning when it is removed from a fire, so, too, separation and distancing can cause detachment.

I have written on my blog of how I read a secular forum for sexless marriages, and I'm seeing something that is relative to what Paul B. is saying. Some time back, on this other forum, there was an increase in discussion of becoming *counter-refusers*. These men and women in *Hades*-marriages speak of no longer being attracted to their spouses, but instead experience revulsion at the thought of re-establishing sexual intimacy in their marriage.

Again, what is supposed to have been unitive in a marriage has, instead, become a chasm of separation. Instead of "It's y'all's sex life," it has become, by necessity, "his and hers" sex lives (or non-sex lives, to be more accurate.)

So, yes, if need be, Paul's suggestion to pull back from sex is valid; I would just add that you keep in mind that you need to guard your heart against allowing scar tissue from your healing to damage your sexual relationship down the road.

(Note to any wives reading this post; if you have to distance yourself from your husband, do so! There is no room for "You owe me sex" if sex is one of the ingredients in a *Hades* stew. But my caution still applies: guard against hardening your heart sexually.)

Suggestion #5: As I began this process I would write her a letter and let her know what I was doing. I would explain I wanted a real, healthy marriage, and was eager to get counseling with her to accomplish that. I would also tell her I would no longer pretend our deeply broken marriage was alright.

Just to be sure that we're on the same page, I'm assuming that this marriage didn't become ugly right after the "I do's", but took some time to develop. And I further assume that you have spoken with your spouse about this nightmare of a marriage, that s/he is not laboring under the illusion that everything is all skittles and beer in your house, and that any letter announcing your belief that the marriage is off the rails won't be a complete stunner.

Okay. So you've talked, you've discussed, you've argued, and all to no avail; you know that you are in a *Hades*-marriage, and you need to work on yourself. Paul's suggestion of a letter is excellent, as it is a way to marshal your thoughts into a cogent statement of intent. You need to be deliberate in writing this letter, taking your time in order to craft a dispassionate explanation of your perceptions of the condition of the marriage and

your intended actions. This is not not something you just dash off! Presenting your concerns and intentions in the form of a letter as an added benefit; it can be presented without interruption by argumentation.

Recent reading has convinced me that after you have written your explanation, you need to have someone that you trust read over it. When you are writing, past emotions and hurts will be stirred up, and it is quite possible that these emotions will translate into accusations and a recounting of injuries. Instead, have a trusted friend or relative help you edit out any recriminations so that a plain statement of your intentions and motivation comes through.

Paul B.'s further recommendation that you desire counseling for the both of you is good, and if your spouse will join you in attending counseling sessions, all the better. There will undoubtedly be pushback from your spouse about the need for counseling, but believe me; there is great need.

A reader made a comment on my blog about the fact that an ...*Ugly* marriage is a marriage that is truly in trouble. This has gone from being merely a sexless marriage to where it is a troubled marriage. If you are experiencing distress at the thought of coming home or your spouse coming home, sexlessness is no longer the only problem that you are facing.

It is often the case that requests for couples' counseling are refused (sometimes by such acerbic barbs as "*You're the one with the problem!*"), so I would recommend that in your letter, you include a statement that you are going to go to counseling with or without your spouse. S/he is invited to come along, but you are going whether they agree to go or not. You are no longer content to suffer in silence; others will now be involved in your marriage.

Succinct Summation

Paul Byerly's suggestions can be succinctly summed up thusly:

1. *Get back to God*
2. *Get in touch with yourself*
3. *Get a life (again)*
4. *Get out of bed ***
5. *Get help*

There's a saying that goes, "When you're in Hell, don't stop to set up camp; keep moving!" I see Paul B.'s advice to those of you in a *Hades*-marriage as the same: get moving! One of my favorite aphorisms from Pogo is "Don't take life so serious, son, it ain't nohow permanent." If you are in a *Hades*-marriage, get going. It doesn't have to be your permanent abode.

CSL

** I was going to say *coitus interruptus*, but that messed up the alliteration, and I do so love alliteration.

CSL, *Therapeutic Distancing*: <https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2017/09/27/and-the-ugly-part-3/>

Chapter 8: “Stop pressuring me!”

(Let me preface this chapter with, and stress as strongly as I can, this one caveat. If the cause of sexual gatekeeping/refusal in your marriage is due to legitimate issues of the past, such as seriously bad teaching or the result of past abuse, then sexual reluctance is understandable. Understandable, yes, but not necessarily permanent. If it comes to light that there has been past physical or spiritual abuse, then it is incumbent upon both, and I stress BOTH, spouses to be understanding of each other and to work on healing, so that the marriage can be put on right footing. That said, this is NOT a free pass to continue refusal; both need to do the work to restore intimacy.)

One of my aids for writing is an idea folder on my laptop, which contains word processing files with snippets of ideas or quotes that I’ve culled over time that I thought, somewhere in the past, might be make good topics to think on and to write about. This chapter was triggered by one of those older snippets.

Apparently some time ago, I had come across a comment by someone whose wife said that she felt “pressured to have sex” and I made a note of it in my Future Posts file. This is a statement that I had seen more than a few times before, as pushback by a gatekeeping/refusing spouses against sexual initiation. In rediscovering that note and thinking about what might lie behind that sort of statement, I found that it triggered three questions that I want to take time to flesh out.

Didn’t You Think That Sex Was Part Of “The Deal”?

Actually, I would ask such a wife several questions:

- *You did know that sex was is part of the expectation of married life when you said “I do”, when you signed the marriage certificate, didn’t you?”*
- *If not, I have a thought experiment for you: can you please name any culture, any society, down through the ages in which sex was NOT a part of a marriage relationship?*
- *Why do you think that your “I do” was so different and so special from other “I do’s” that it set your marriage apart from all the rest of the marriages in history?*
- *And, finally, if you, by your “I do”, promised your spouse that you willingly enter into a sexual relationship, why is it transformed into “pressure?”*

One word I’m hearing bandied about these days is “*privilege*,” and I’m wondering if some people come into marriage with a “*privilege*” mindset. One thought is that someone marries thinking “*It’s my privilege to NOT have sex; my spouse doesn’t have a right to expect sex in our marriage.*” Another tack might be, “*Sex is a privilege, and by Billy Bedamned Hangtree, s/he is gonna have to earn the privilege!*” Believe it or not, I’ve seen both mindsets expressed.

I always marvel at the statement, “I feel pressure to have sex.” When you say “I do”, you are entering into a sexual relationship, and you promised to “do” your spouse. Where

does this so-called “pressure” come from other than believing that you are entitled to carve out a right to celibacy?

Other Pressures?

In discussing this topic with Wife, she made an interesting comment. Shaking her head, she rhetorically asked, “Do you feel pressure to feed your children? Do you feel pressure to go to work and earn money?”

And she is onto something, isn’t she? We DO face responsibilities for ourselves to others, whether it be going to work to provide, to clothe, feed and care for our children, to pay bills, etc. Imagine if someone were to tell their employer, “*You’re pressuring me to perform my job!*” Or to tell your kids, “*Don’t tell me you are hungry, it puts pressure on me to feed you!*” Try telling the bank, “*Don’t send me letters asking me to pay my mortgage payment, it stresses me out when you ask for money!*”

- We have a word for someone who doesn’t perform their job: *bad employee*.
- We have a word for someone who doesn’t try to provide for their kids: *bad parent*.
- We have a word for someone who doesn’t try to keep up their bills: *bad financial risk*.

So, what should we say of someone who does not accept the obligation/responsibility (for that is what one assumes with an “*I do*,” responsibility) of their promise to enter into a sexual relationship? *A bad spouse?*

Hmmm..... Maybe I’ve stepped over a line, and made some people feel ... what?

Or Something Else?

Make people feel... what? Could it be that it isn’t so much pressure, but something more like... *guilt?*

After all, I can’t bring myself to believe that, in this day and age, someone would actually go into a marriage with the idea that sex isn’t part of the arrangement, so the “too much pressure” is really bogus, isn’t it? But it has to come from somewhere, right?

And I’m thinking that it does come from somewhere else, that it comes from our desire to protect our self-image, our belief that we have *integrity* as a person. All too often, we feel that we have to be perfect, and if something is wrong or off, it has to be the other person’s fault, that it can’t be my fault. And so we lash out in an effort to push the blame onto the other.

- *It’s not that I don’t want sex, it’s that you are always pressuring me.*
- *It’s not that I don’t like sex, it’s that you haven’t wooed me.*
- *It’s not that I don’t desire you, it’s that I get tired of your nagging about it.*

But we know that the failure is inside of us, and so, to protect our self-esteem, we strike out in order to avoid dealing with our failure to make fulfilling our promise a priority. Yes, I may have actually meant it when I promised to “love, honor and cherish” you, but so much of life has gotten in the way. And now your asking is a reminder of my failure to keep my promise to you.

I think that it simply comes down to this, that “*your pressuring me to have sex*” is simply shorthand for “*You’re making me feel guilty and I don’t like it*”.

As a card-carrying curmudgeon, I’m willing to bet that guilt triggers much of the “*Stop putting pressure on me*” pushback from a refusing spouse.

I think that unless there was an intent to deceive right at the “I do’s”, a gatekeeper (a *mored/moredet****) actually accepted the fact, in the beginning, that marriage was a sexual relationship. Somehow, however, other things choked out the intention of the original promise.

We know of the Parable of the Four Soils that Jesus told, and how he applied it to the hearts of those who hear his word. I’m thinking that the parable can also be applied (not interpreted, mind you!) to marriage. Just as weeds choked out the new growth, everyday living can choke out our good intentions.

If so, it’s time to do some weeding.

CSL

** Rabbinic term for a spouse who refuses sex.

Chapter 9: Are “Anti-Pearls” Hurting Your Relationship?

“Anti-Pearls?”, I can just hear someone saying. “*CSL, have you been at the barbecue sauce again?*” I actually have something in mind, so bear with me. (And, no, I haven’t been hitting the BBQ sauce.)

We all know the little pearl analogies and homilies that are told *ad nauseum*. How God puts a piece of sand in an oyster, and how the sand is an irritant to the oyster. And we are told that the oyster immediately goes to work and begins to transform that irritant, that piece of gritty sand, into a beautiful pearl by covering it with layer after layer of nacre, thus transforming it from miserable irritant to fine gem. Therefore, boys and girls, God gives you irritants in your lives so that you, too, can bring forth pearls in your life, in the form of good character. Thus endeth the lesson for this morning.

These little sermonettes are alright, as far as they go, but they are always a little short on the “how”, aren’t they? Oh, they are nice little object lessons, but other than a standard “be nice” type of response, there usually isn’t any explanation on “how to transform that irritant”, is there?

“Grace Greater”

But I believe that the Bible actually does say how we can transform irritants into pearls. In Titus 2, we read,

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, v. 11-12,

For clarity, I’m going to redo this sentence, striking out extra clauses, in order to reduce it to its central statement, the simple subject, verb and predicate:

~~*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,*~~

“The grace of God has appeared, training us to live godly lives.”

“Okay, fine,” you might say, “*turnabout is fair play. Where is the how?*” My answer is that it lies in the nature of the *Natural*. In the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus taught,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matt. 5:38-39 ESV)

There's your "how" right there. You've probably heard the phrase, "*It's only natural*", used in all sorts of different situations over the span of your life. Well, what Jesus is saying is that we are to not be 'natural', but 'supernatural', instead.

Ages ago, I was trying to fix a leak under our kitchen sink. I can't remember what tool I was using, but the part that I was working on was stuck and I was pushing really hard, trying to force it to budge, when suddenly, my hand slipped and the tool I was using sprang back and hit me in the face. Instinctively, my first reaction was to make a fist because I wanted to punch back; but after my brain kicked in, a half-second after the event, I realized that there was no one to hit, that I had not been attacked, that I had been hit by my tool. However, that smack to my face had triggered a natural, instinctual reaction to retaliate. While there was no one to retaliate against, my first instinct upon being slapped was to retaliate. And it's this instinct, our natural self, that Jesus calls us to resist, and grace helps with.

In any situation in which I have the opportunity to retaliate, whether it be emotionally, verbally, physically, etc., I have the choice to go with my 'natural' response, or to act (with the help of God's grace) 'supernaturally.' Through the Holy Spirit, God's grace is offered to us in every situation, to enable us to overcome our 'natural' self. We are told "*to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life*" (Eph. 4:22). It's our choice; God doesn't promise to take our old self from us. It's our choice how to react, whether naturally or supernaturally, with God's grace.

And it's at this point that we choose to make pearls or anti-pearls.

"Anti-pearls"?

Making pearls comes naturally to oysters; to people, not so much. Our natural inclination is to retaliate, and if we can't retaliate, to hold onto our hurts and insults, nursing them into life in our souls. We call them '*grudges*.' At the point in our lives where we receive irritants, God extends to us His grace to help us to ignore our *old nature* and to choose to live supernaturally. You might ask, "*Is something so simple as not firing a verbal missile when s/he misses my bat really living supernaturally?*" If living "*naturally*" means that you would have fired a broadside but you didn't, then yes, that's living supernaturally, letting God's grace train you in godly living.

But what happens when we don't let grace train us? We live by our human natures, and that's not a pretty sight. In his wonderful book, *The Great Divorce*, the story of a one-day vacation from Hell to Heaven, C. S. Lewis has an incident in which a mother holds a grudge against God. At the beginning of her dialog, she tells her husband, "*If He loved me why did He take away Michael from me? I wasn't going to say anything about that. But it's pretty hard to forgive, you know.*"

As the dialog between the two continues, Lewis shows us something about this woman's supposed "Mother Love"; instead her love is actually possession, and she has been wronged by God. She reveals her grudge this way:

Give me my boy. Do you hear? ... I don't believe in a God who keeps mother and son apart. I believe in a God of Love. No one has a right to come between me and my son. Not even God. Tell Him that to His face. I want my boy, and I mean to have him. He is mine, do you understand? Mine, mine, mine, for ever and ever."

By Billy Bedamned Hangtree, she has rights, and God has violated her rights!

As they walk away, Lewis asks his guide about how things will end for her. His mentor tells him,

I do not know how her affair will end. But it may well be that at this moment she's demanding to have him down with her in Hell. That kind is sometimes perfectly ready to plunge the soul they say they love in endless misery if only they can still in some fashion possess it.

This is the outcome of a grudge. A slight, a wrong, an injury, that is nourished and cherished becomes our identity. We will identify with our grudge, pampering it like a child. The grudge becomes our *raison d'être*.

So, how do we actually grow "pearls" in our lives and not grudges? Much time needs to be dedicated to serious thought and examination; at the head of the list of things we need to ponder is whether our right to not be hurt is more precious to us than God and following Him? The question we need to grapple with is, "Am I serious in following Christ and living in the grace of God? Or have I merely adopted label, "American Evangelical," as my lifestyle? All too often, Christianity is merely an accessory to someone's and not a conviction.

CSL

(Seriously, folks, hie thee to a library, a store, the Apple Bookstore or the Kindle store and get *The Great Divorce*. There is SO much there!)