

Lay Marital *Counselling*



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LAY MARRIAGE COUNSELLING

For Busy Pastors and Lay Counsellors

Transcribed from Dr.D.A.Seamands'
lectures for busy pastors and
lay pastoral counsellors.
Used with his permission.

Genesis 2:24

*“For this reason a man will leave his father
and mother and be united to his wife,
and they will become one flesh.
The man and his wife were both naked,
and they felt no shame.”*

Marital Counselling is a type of counselling (for interpersonal conflicts) that is manageable within a lay pastoral counselor or a busy pastor's role. After a maximum of 6-10 sessions, if the couple is still unable to make it on their own, it may be better to apply more individual deeper counselling (for intrapersonal conflicts). The pastor helping the couple may need to refer them to full-time counsellors if he has no time or is not trained for marital counselling. In my own

experience, if the few sessions show that the root cause of the marital problems is more personal than interpersonal, I will see them separately and then bring them together again when they are ready. This must be done with mutual agreement or it will not be marital counselling. Passing of confidential information from one spouse to the other is forbidden unless danger to lives exist. I find couples who want to save their marriages do not mind this conditional release of information.

Counselling for Interpersonal Conflicts where Both Spouses Meet the Counsellor Together

(This is only one of several types of marriage counselling)

1st Session

From the onset, certain points of cooperation are expected from the counsellee for the pastoral counsellor's role to be effective. Here are some of them:

Ensure Commitment and Willingness to Work Together

If the above attitude is lacking, the couple may be making use of the counsellor for their own purposes e.g. to appear innocent in a pending divorce. If that is the case, then both they and you may be wasting time and energy.

Check

- Their understanding of marriage
- Their theology of marriage
- Whether they have crossed the fidelity line

- The percentage of hope each spouse has of saving or improving the marriage e.g.

“Mr.Y, what is the percentage of hope that your marriage can be saved?”

(Answer: 100%)

“Mrs.Y, what about you?”

(Answer: 50%)

The replies provide an essential guideline as we need to be willing to work with the couple at their level of hope and commitment. We want to hold on to anything that will give any degree of leverage even if it is just to live together peacefully for the sake of their children.

(Editor: In my experience, husbands who are willing to see a counsellor seem to have higher hope, than wives, that their marriages can be saved. Unwilling husbands would not even agree to seek help. Wives are rarely against saving their marriages unless they find it extremely difficult to live with their husband after the latter have slept with other women or, even rarer, if they have already decided to marry another man. Otherwise, though wives' hopes are low, due to having waited so long for

the husbands to change for the better, they really want to be reconciled. Strangely or not, men who have other women in their lives may also have high hope for their marriage. Probably, they simply want to have the best of both worlds, which most women cannot accept.)

- Whether they would make marriage a priority in their lives if they both want to be reconciled.

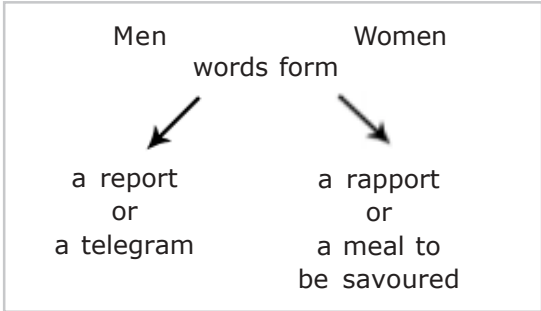
Watch out for Issues Involved

The couple would usually have had some communication breakdown for several months or years already. We may have to teach them how to communicate afresh.

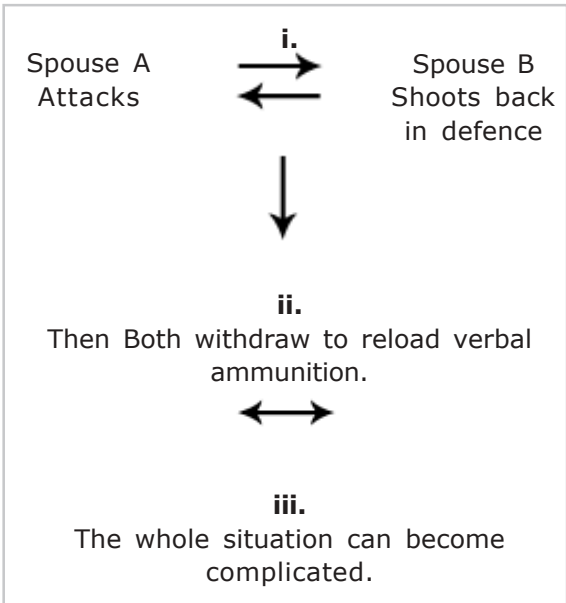
In marriage:

- If a couple knows how to talk constructively about their own problems, they could probably solve their own problems ¹.
- Men and women do not seem to talk the same language. The difference in the understanding and usage of spoken words is called "*Genderlect*" ². They tend to view words from different angles:

To:



Hence, when a couple comes for help, they are already having a gun-smoke type of communication ...



Prevention or Treatment of Communication Breakdown

First steps in marital counselling.

ACTION

If the husband and wife are not friendly in communication, start with this:

- i. **LISTEN** very carefully to their communication. They may be more courageous to talk out their real feelings and thoughts before you than by themselves.
- ii. You may need to **INTERVENE** by using the Listening-Speaking Sequence. It is an attempt to break barriers in verbal communication; it is a highly structured approach in order to:
 - slow down the process of a heated up communication.
 - to get them in touch with their feelings without making value judgments on the feelings. Usually, they will be arguing about facts and perceptions but not listening to the feelings of the other person.

iii. Give them the *RULES OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION*:

A.

The couple must communicate in a way that does **NOT attack** the other person by e.g. key words, body language or phoney words.

B.

When spoken to, either party must **NOT defend himself/herself** (because the other person is not judging you).

C.

The communication must be done with an "**I**" message rather than a "You" message (because "I" describes "my" feelings but "you" tends to describe "your" fault).

D.

Eliminate the word "that" e.g.
"I feel angry ... " **NOT** "I feel **that** "

Demonstration

Pastoral Counselor:

Ist **"I am going to teach you a communication exercise."
"Mei Li, make a feeling statement to Chong Tek."**

e.g. *"I feel worthless when you don't have time for me ... "*

2nd "Chong Tek, tell Mei Li what she said to you."

(Chong Tek may squirm!)

e.g. *"She says that she feels worthless when I don't have time for her."* or *"She is upset when I don't spend time with her."*

3rd "Mei Li, is that what you said to Chong Tek?"

i.e. "Has Chong Tek heard what you said?"

If her answer is "No", then repeat the three steps till Mei Li is accurately Heard.

Then go on to the fourth step.

4th "Chong Tek, do you agree that when this happens, that is how Mei Li feels?"

(Chong Tek may squirm again.)

THEN REPEAT THE FOUR-STEP EXERCISE WITH THE OTHER SPOUSE MAKING THE 1ST STATEMENT.

Pastoral Counsellor:
*“Chong Tek, now it’s your turn. Chong Tek,
make a feeling statement to Mei Li ”*

This exercise often helps the couple realise that each is usually not being purposefully hurtful/mean but is seeing things from a different angle. It helps them forgive each other for being what they are, but it requires much grace, patience and understanding.

Remember:

Encoding and decoding one message
**is being done by two people who have
their own styles.**
This leads to their own problems.

Please read *Mind Your Language* in this series for other aspects of verbal communication.

Watch Out for Crazy-making and Crazy-makers

In this situation:

- a. One spouse (or both) denies the whole communication process and when cornered, he often says,

"How could you see me that way?"
"I'm sorry that you took it that way."

Such words pour guilt on the victim. Such "*sorrys*" are not an admission of wrong doing but a polite way of questioning, "*Who asks you to view me wrongly? It's not my fault!*"

- b. Sometimes such denial shows up as e.g.

- threatening stares or mimicry that prevent the spouse from fully expressing herself or himself in the presence of a third person.
- over-reactions to situations
- changing of subject from time to time
- showing of excessive anger so as to shut the other person up
- excessive laughing (this is more common in men who are getting in touch with their emotions but do not know what to do)

- c. They are crazymakers because they make others confused and cause chaos in relationships e.g. in an office/home.

They make you feel crazy for kicking up a fuss about nothing!

Such marriages can still keep going by making the partner feel he or she is nuts and it's all his/her fault! As long as they ignore each other, there will be no external conflicts.

A General Example

A hostile husband and wife after 10 years of marriage

The husband, Chan, had an explosive temper and an extroverted temperament. He attributed it to his being born that way. Everyone else gave in to him. Why couldn't she do the same? Initially his, wife, Janet, tolerated his behaviour.

Janet, of an introverted temperament, had endured his ways since courtship days. Finally, worn out by the frequent shouting, she answered back, was hit and then, thereafter, she began to retaliate physically.

Both loved their two children and wanted to save their marriage. But how?

We met for five Sessions (with an additional session referred to another couple for clearing of past occultic involvement through Chan having being dedicated to Chinese warrior gods as a teenager.). Initially, Janet was very hostile, yelled at him and was near an explosive stage throughout the first session. After two sessions, I had to see them separately. By then they had learnt to forgive and to be forgiven and had, by God's grace, worked out some major compromises.

- i.e. Chan learnt to diffuse his rising anger before it reaches the rage stage by walking out of the house, if he should feel irritated by Janet's comments. He gradually learnt to leave her alone when she indicated that she was tired and needed some time to herself. Previously, he would accuse her of being unfriendly.
- Janet, on the other hand, learnt to control her tongue and to believe him when he said that he loved her and wanted to save the marriage very much. She took the initiative to change her job in order to spend more time with the family. Both looked forward to helping other couples in their cell group, thus joining God's troop of healed helpers!.

Diagnosis:

"What is the Real Issue?"
&
"How May We Help?"

1.

Common Presenting Problems

The presenting problem may not be the real issue.

A Major Principle of All Interhuman Relationships is that

In a marital relationship, nothing is just ... e.g. money, sex, the way you dress. It is always a "metaphysical message" ... a message that tries to convey the fact that *there is an invisible relational (emotional) need that is not met.*

2. Categories of Diagnosis

- i. Friendly marriage problems which need more educational counselling e.g. non-consummation, difficulties with sexuality needs, lack of understanding of personal temperaments.
- ii. Children's needs e.g. in discipline, use of finances and parental dreams for them.
- iii. Fights and/or Arguments e.g. negligence, abuse, financial problems, extramarital indulgences
- iv. Conflicts with extended families - this is common in families where the Biblical order of "leave-cleave-one flesh" has not been followed by the couple (Genesis 2:24).

Primary Causes & Help

1.

Cause:

Need for Emotional Space/Distance

Help ...

Where this is a major issue, our role is to help the couple understand and accept their own as well as each other's personalities. The conflict may present itself as one partner "growing cold" when he/she is merely and really tired e.g. after the arrival of their firstborn child with all the necessary adjustment to make.

2.

Cause:

Power Struggle

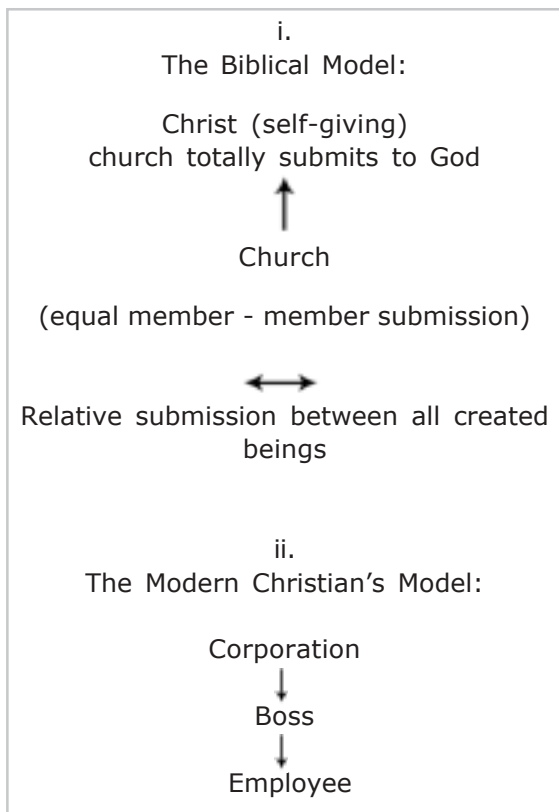
Who Is In Charge/Sets the Censors?

(A Fair Fight Issue)

Help...

Where this is a major issue, our role is to help them sort out their understanding of marriage models.

Submission Models



In (i.), *the mutually submissive model*, the husband and the wife actually have gifts which they are to use to serve each other. The focus is on the ability to fulfill roles depending on the types of gifts each has rather than on who has the main say in the marriage. Only Christ has absolute authority over both husband and wife.

In (ii), *an authoritarian-submission model*, the wife strictly submits to the husband as the head of the family. If both partners in marriage agree to follow this arrangement, then they may still live in peace just as in many Asian homes where this is acceptable. However, in most cases, the one compelled to submit is brewing with impatience or anger and wants to be give her views and be treated as an equal, as they are. To the extreme, the husband becomes a little god to the wife and that would be unbiblical. However, many do not see it this way. In fact, the Bible teaches no other submission among fellow human beings other than mutual submission. This is true in the case of parent-child, husband-wife or master-servant relationships.

The counsellor's role is to help them find out the relative expectations of their roles in these issues.

(Editor: How then could we understand passages like Ephesians 5:21 - 6:33? We dare not assume that the parallel drawn between Christ's headship of the church and a human husband's headship of his wife to be of equal authority. How can it be if Christ is the perfect Son of Man and the Son of God

*while we are mere sinners on the mend?
I would rather view the above passage
this way³ ...*

*Women, being more feeling creatures,
quite often make decisions with their
hearts. But because they are more
people orientated/relational, they are
trying to find out which decision will
bring more peace than quarrels at
home. Hence, they may appear
indecisive and wishy-washy; to offend
their spouses will leave them lousy the
rest of the day. Therefore, Paul could be
just reminding them to put on their
thinking caps when they relate with their
male counterparts, over and above
letting their feelings over-control them,
so that their husbands can accept their
decisions. The result is the command:
Wives, submit to your husbands ... as
submission requires a controlled use of
the mind, especially when one disagrees
with someone over the issue at hand. In
other words, Paul was asking wives to
grow up in their weaker thinking
function and become more balanced
people.*

*Men, being more thinking or rational
creatures, tend to be less efficient in the
use of their feelings or relational
function. Therefore, Paul had to remind
them to focus on their weaker feeling*

function and learn to relate with their feeling wives with Christ-like love. This would be to the husbands' advantage, for then their wives would be able to receive their decisions better when given on the plate of feelings. When in emergency or serious family matters, decisions can be made in good timing. Paul, in this case, was asking husbands to grow up by stretching their weaker relational part and become more balanced people too.)

Cultural adjustments have to be considered e.g. some wives wish their husbands were more assertive while others wish they were less so. In a few cultures in the world, women are accepted to be the heads of the families e.g. in the Minangkabau culture originally from Sumatra. Many Christian wives wish their husbands will lead spiritually but are happy to share equally in e.g. finances, child-rearing, decision-making. However, few couples discuss this issue in detail during their courtship days. Hence, definitions of equality and roles remain unclear. Consequently, since the home system needs to function, one spouse, or both, simply follow his or her parents' model till a problem surfaces. On the other hand, many husbands are afraid of offending their wives. They also need to

learn how to perceive and respond to women's increasing freedom of expression in all areas. Together, they could still work out a happy compromise where roles become more defined at home, even though they may be different outside.

Remember

Only Jesus Christ has absolute power over everyone and everything
(e.g. Colossians 1:15-20)

3.

Cause:

Trust Issue

Help ...

At times, a particular marital problem had actually started before marriage where either or both partners are so afraid of losing the other partner that they keep past secrets from each other. In most cases, the sharing of secrets enhances the relationship if both are mature enough to cope with them. In fact, it may be wise to be truthful at the premarital stage so that they give each other the opportunity to say "No" to the relationship. However, this must be done at the right timing and in God's love. Otherwise, later, the information may be used to harm the other person as has happened sometimes.

- i. *"Can I trust him/her with:
money, power, sex (opposite)?"*

Caution to Married Couples:

Consider this statement:

*"If I don't get along well with my spouse,
anyone else of the opposite gender will
appear more attractive!"*

Therefore, it is unwise to share marriage problems with someone of the opposite gender alone, no matter how good a friend he/she is.

Marital counselling requires the couple to meet with the counsellor together, at least during the 1st session. So that they may both trust the counselor to be neutral.

(However, in a professional setting, initially, counsellors may have to listen to such problems from the party that seeks help first. It will then not be *marriage/marital* counselling but personal counselling.)

- ii. *"Can I trust my partner with my
feelings? (Who I really am)?"*

or

*"If I do trust him/her, openly he/she
seemingly accepts me but will he/she be
filing it up in a cabinet to use it against
me later?"*

or

"Can I expect unconditional love?"

- Explain to them that broken trust takes time to rebuild. It is like a bridge. People tread on new bridges carefully.
- Explain to the innocent party that though they have forgiven each other, they will occasionally still be ambushed by angry feelings. These old feelings are expected to return. Therefore, they have to commit the bad feelings to the Lord Jesus repeatedly ⁴.
- Explain to the guilty party that the other partner is going to blow up again at times and that there is no use saying, "There you go again ... "

In summary, prayer, repentance and communication are required again and again!

4.

Cause:

Self-Identity / Discomfort in Role

One or both spouses may not have established their own identities as God's beloved children; as a man or a woman in Christ. Thus, their hidden questions may be:

- *Who am I in the marriage?*
- *What roles do I play?*
- *Do I feel comfortable in my masculinity/femininity?*

Help ...

- Write down words for roles and ask them which words they feel comfortable with and why e.g. some women feel more comfortable in being a leader than a follower and vice versa. Examples of words:

woman	man
mother	father
female	male
wife	husband
lover	worker

- Teach them acceptance of self as this is so important because the person with a low self-esteem will over- demand from their spouse in order to make him/her feel good. In a way,

“You can't be happily married with another if you can't be happily married with yourself.”

D.A.Seamands

Danger

We often look to others to make or break our security, happiness, etc. In marriage, the insecure spouse tends to get his/her identity through the family or social status of the other person. This can lead to many other problems like:

- the blaming of spouse for personal or family failures
- the over-demand on spouse's behaviour
- the reluctant shirking of personal responsibility for his/her own family life.

Therefore, we must remember that:

We cannot ask our spouse/marriage to do for us what only God can do!

Caution

However, we must also not over-spiritualise this problem with cliches like,

"God is all that you need anyhow!"
Why?

This is because God has created us such that only other people can meet certain of our needs. If we preach that "God is all that we need" glibly, we will put people with genuine sexual and emotional needs on a false guilt trip.

God often does love us through our spouses and family members. Jesus's call is to love one another as He has loved us.

Teach them to consider themselves of ultimate value (not worthiness) to God who has sent His Son to die for them and to reconcile them to Him. They are to seek their identity in God alone i.e. be rightly proud that He is their Father.

5.

Sex

(physical oneness between a man and a woman)

*"Two issues will always walk into your counselling room:
God and sex."*

(Read Genesis 1-33)

"The Way is written into every part of life."

E.Stanley Jones

"God is a Scientist, not a magician!"

Inscription at Einstein's
Laboratory in Princeton University

Help ...

Though we may believe that God is a God of order in the general physical realm, we often do not believe this in the sexual realm. Although sex is not the most important subject,

- Sex education needs to be heard first from the pulpit, church and Sunday School, and not from the media.
 - It should be talked about with spouse and children.
 - Two common problems met are non-consummation of marriage and lack of mutual enjoyment of the sexual intercourse
- i. Explain that it is a female myth to say, *"If he really loves me, he will know what I like/need ... not only in sexual issues, but in other issues too."*

Please ... Husbands are not Mind-Readers!

- ii. Help them understand the basic human reality that no two persons are exactly alike. Sexual pleasure is achieved with a lot of hard work and not instantaneously. Therefore, marriage partners need to communicate with each other what his/her needs are. So, why don't or why can't they?

- iii. Generally speaking, in our broken world:
 - Men put up with intimacy in order to get physical sexual contact.
 - Men's fear is incompetence in the sexual contact.
 - Men can have physical sex without affection.

By contrast:

- Women put up with sex in order to have intimacy.
- Women fear being used in sexual contact.
- Women want more tenderness, caring, talking to and being held affectionately.

This does not mean that women are less sexual. They are simply different.

"Despite all the research in hell, we couldn't produce a single pleasure. The best we can do is to take the Enemy's products of pleasure and distort them."

Screwtape's Letters ⁵

Generally, if the couple does not achieve reasonable sexual happiness for the first one to one and a half years, they should look for help.

- iv. Deal with sexual problems theologically. Read books like *Eros Redeemed*. ⁶
- v. What is O.K. to do and not to do?

Generally, anything that a *husband and wife* accept happily and which is:

- physically comfortable and healthy
- emotionally fulfilling
- mutually agreeable

is morally right.

6.

Lack of Centricity

Centricity is Spouse A's ability to make Spouse B feel like he/she occupies top priority in Spouse A's life. The problem arises when Spouse B feels that Spouse A does not really care about what he/she feels/says/does.

Help ...

Teach communication again e.g.

a.

Each spouse is to fill in the blanks with his/her own words on the dotted line below:

*"I feel cherished
(first in your life, most important to you)
when you say"*

Both separately write their thoughts and feelings down and then share them.

b.

Each spouse is to focus on the positive and beautiful aspects of the other spouse and to ignore the negative and ugly, especially in non-essentials. In this way, time, energy and tangible resources are saved to be re-channeled into the actual task of building up love rather than into the breaking down of each other repeatedly.

*Ultimately, only God can break us down ...
and He does it ever so gently!*

7.

Unrealistic Expectations and Illusions

*“The lie of the 20th century is:
‘You can have it all!’*

The lie of the next century appears to be:

*‘If you can’t have it all, grab whatever is in your
path!’”*

D.A.Seamands

(Editor: How prophetic!!)

Consequently, lies bring discomfort and
breeds anger and moodiness.

Help ...

At times, educative counselling is required, especially when the first child arrives. Over-expectation of child and parental behaviour can drive all crazy!

- Teach parents and children a more realistic lifestyle regarding goals in life generally.
- Teach each person a more realistic daily schedule specifically.
- Teach them to make full use of what God has entrusted to them in terms of energy, time and material resources.

At other times, it is a matter of being more creatively realistic in expectations.

If goals cannot be reached in a familiar manner, why not try another way out instead of getting all frustrated?

It may involve matters as simple and routine as where to eat and what to do when little children cannot sit still in the coffee shop. Consider getting a beautiful strap for an active child to use with the baby chair; provide toys to distract him. It may be counter-productive if the parents demand very young children to sit still and be bored.

8.

Turf or Territorial Rights

Help ...

We need to respect each other's boundaries ... emotionally and geographically e.g. the wife may have priority to use the kitchen her way while the husband has the priority to use the store/guest room his way.

This is especially crucial in today's families where many may be working from home, whether man or woman.

Negotiations for Change

Here, we have a choice between using:

Secular principles which are according to
A Contract Therapy Model

This means that both parties work out a set of flexible rules to follow. If either or both parties find the rules impractical, they may break the contract.

OR

Biblical principles which are according to
A Covenant Therapy Model

This means that both parties
*agree to submit to God's rules for families
and individuals as well as draw up
flexible practical rules to follow.*

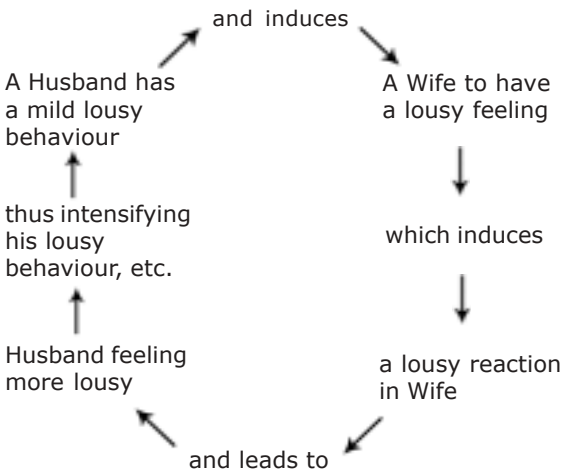
They agree that even if they have problems following the practical details, they will always live as husbands and wives till death do they part. The only exception is divorce in the event of adultery as mentioned by Moses and Jesus (although the faithful party may choose to forgive and continue the marriage relationship).

Help ...

1. Issues on the Communication of Feelings (see page 9-12)
2. Making of Covenants for Change:

Change behavior → Change feelings

Sometimes, we cannot wait for good feelings before we decide to do good or else both parties will be caught in useless damaging vicious cycles.



As the above events create a negative feedback cycle, the husband and wife need to switch it to a positive feedback cycle. The importance of some change is

that the spouse feels thinks that the other partner cares enough to change, even if he (she) doesn't understand how she (he) really feels/thinks.

Teach psychologically (relatively) healthy individuals that they cannot wait to allow their feelings to excessively control their behavior. Instead, they need to take the bull of feelings by the horns, in order to break the damaging circuits in husband - wife relationships.

To help our counselees do this, Dr.Seamands has suggested two kinds of covenant.

i.
A Learning Covenant

Example

Wife is to inform Husband that his behaviour is hurting her as soon as she begins to feel the hurt.

He must not defend himself. Instead, he is to say, "*Thank you for telling me.*"

This is commonly needed because the more educated man often puts down the woman by body language or words, both in private and in public. He usually does not realise this but thinks he is caring for her or he is helping her face up to "the truth" (typical, one might say). This is common among extreme perfectionists. She is to teach him and he is to allow her to do so.

ii.

An Action/Behaviour Covenant

"What do you want him/her to do or not to do?"

- a. Keep the number of changes down to 1 - 3; 1 would be the best.
- b. The behavioural change must be specific.
- c. Build in grace and graciousness!!

Example

Question:

*"How many failures would you allow?
1 per week?"*

Tell them to:

- Accept the fact that it is very hard and that it takes time to change. The realisation that your partner is trying his best is very encouraging.
- Affirm the partner e.g. When Wife grants more physical intimacy to him, Husband is to say:

"I appreciate what you are doing for me"

Remember:

For women, sex is an outer expression of an inner grace.

(Editor: Usually, the romantic side of life will resurrect as behaviour and feelings improve. In the counselling room, it is such a joy to watch once angry spouses sitting close to each other and looking at each other again!)

Follow-Up

1.

Schedule a check-up

This is to be not later than a month because:

- It prevents embarrassment on their part if there is failure and it is easier for them to establish contact with you again.
- It is easier for future contacts.

2.

Encourage participating in a Marriage Encounter/Enrichment Group if there is one nearby, preferably run Asian style.

AWAS!

Most of these programmes do not work for those who are facing serious problems. These couples may explode in the group, hurting others and themselves. They will need to wait till communication has improved.

3.

Redeem the time among unbelievers if they should seek your help.

Miracles are seen when someone's marriage is helped. The pastoral

counsellor's role is to help them know that because God has forgiven us our sins, we can forgive others their sins against us. The secret of the Christian community is not that we do not hurt each other in this fallen world, but that when we do hurt each other, we are able to forgive and continue to love one another as God has loved us ... this is the meaning of God's grace. We are there to love them, not judge them in their time of need.

“ ... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

4.

Finally, you might like to think about this ...

As a pastoral counsellor ... your:

First concern is:

*To save a marriage at all cost
(the best)*

Second concern is:

To help through the pains of a separation or divorce if the tragedy is inevitable, as where adultery has been committed and the unfaithful party is unrepentant (second best)

*Third concern is:
How to follow God's rules for counseling those
seeking remarriage*

e.g.

*where the other spouse has already remarried and
there is no likelihood for the original couple to
live as husband and wife again*

or

*where small children need the support of father
and mother figures for their development and
there is none around outside of a remarriage for
the faithful party.*

Editor: The above guidelines may appear unbiblical but if we meditate on our Lord's words and seek His will for each case, I believe He will show us His ways which are just and compassionate. Many couples are in situations where the emotions are dead and adultery and/or violence has been committed. We may sometimes have to encourage the faithful spouse to separate without going through a divorce, if he/she can live reasonably safely with the children. Reconciliation is always the first & final good

**PAUSE TO REFLECT ON WHAT YOU
HAVE READ.**

**REMEMBER TO LISTEN TO THE
COUNSELLOR PAR EXCELLENCE.**

“Resolving conflict is the price of deepening intimacy in our broken world.”

D.A.Seamands

Reflection

1. If married, read chapter 5 of “Building a Love House is Hard Work” and ask yourself:

“Which stage am I at in my marriage?”

2. Ask yourself:

“What is God saying to me and what is my response e.g. Will I give thanks, exercise my will to change, etc.?”

3. For pastoral counsellors who are single, ask yourselves:

*“What are my limitations or strengths as I engage in marital counselling?” or
“Is this someone else’s role?”*

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