

How You Can Move Past This Stigma in Your Marriage

Every journey has its first step. This is true of the man, woman or couple who want to go from where they are in their marriage to becoming lover-spouses.

Where we are in our marriage may be a good, stable place or it may be a volatile, fragile place. Whether you've been married for a year or decades, you've experienced the ups and downs and various seasons of marriage.

Oh, and here is another variable in your journey of marriage: Not only do your circumstances change, but you and your spouse change along the way. You begin your marriage from that bright-eyed, bushy-tailed couple in your first apartment to the first house with children, multiple responsibilities, and changing roles and priorities. Trying to balance your lives, you both mature—at least hopefully.

What we graciously call “maturing” is you both actually changing, pure and simple. You and your spouse used to believe and act in a certain way toward one another, but now that's become different—calmer, shall we say.

Then there are the changes you and your spouse individually go through. There are shadows in their life that they've either faced or keep running from. They've been altered by a storm or crisis that has come into their life. You or your spouse may have become less fit, more cautious or sadly, even indifferent in areas of your lives.

Change is the one absolute of life. We all experience change, and depending on the paradigms we're operating upon, our marriage can move from a vibrant lovership during dating and the early years into a functionsip down the road.

A functionship is when romance takes a vacation from the marriage. The couple loses sight of who or why they married and focuses on the management aspect of the marriage and family.

Functionships are really common in Christian marriages, especially if your theology focuses on doing the “right thing” more than being loving. The functionship focuses on the many things that have to happen on the day-to-day basis: who’s paying the bills, who’s making the money, who’s saving money, who’s taking the children to school, picking them up, taking them to their various activities and who’s handling all the errands including church, working out, dry cleaners, managing the fix-it guy, the yard, dishes, laundry and so on.

When a couple moves toward functionship, there’s less time for each other. The couple often stops praying together, and engagement in physical touch slows way down. You go to bed tired, and life and marriage are no longer fun for either of you.

If a functionship becomes the norm for a couple, both lower their expectations of love and passion; they accept the grind as normal. Since both silently agree to just accept this functionship lifestyle, there seems to be an understanding that this is just the way things are and possibly the way they always will be.

However, over time, the unmet emotional connection, the lack of spiritual connection, genuine praise and appreciation begins to take a toll. When this happens, an individual or the couple might build up resentment or hopelessness, which causes internal pain and conflict.

When this happens, one or both people in the marriage have to adapt to survive this lack of being in a lovership. They might overwork, overeat, overexercise, watch pornography, have emotional affairs or intrigue to medicate the pain of being in

a functionship. Sadly, when an individual or the couple adapts by self-medicating to survive a functionship, that self-medicating method can actually become an addiction or a greater problem for the marriage.

Remember, this is a slow process. This is the proverbial frog in the pot. This is month after month, year after year of not feeling appreciated, respected, heard, connected to that caused the slow ache to medicate. The decision to medicate starts off very slow, extra cookies, extra alcohol, racier pictures, more sharing outside the marriage, eating, hours at work.

Many of the couples I counsel during Intensives can see the increase in entertainment, volunteering and church activities as out of control now, but rarely could they see it as the functionship was growing.

This is when one or both might go to counseling to stop the medicating behavior, but the pain from being in a functionship remains. This person might fail again and again because the pain from the lack of being in a lovership has not ended.

The functionship will eventually create a crisis for the marriage. How the couple navigates and takes responsibility for this can make the difference of whether or not if the marriage will survive.

Functionship was never God's plan for marriage. He designed marriage to be a lovership of three people—Himself, Adam and Eve. The design of a "one-being Trinity on earth as it is in heaven" was his last masterpiece of creation.

The three being one heavenly Trinity is one based on amazing love and respect for one another. This was God's biggest dream that we humans, especially those of us who are saved and filled with His Word and Spirit, would choose to be motivated by love toward our spouse.

We all know the story. God created man, then Eve, then His final creation was marriage. We all know what happens in Genesis 3 as well. Their sin caused a huge separation between God and His marriage creation.

However, glory to God, through Christ all of that sin has been paid for. In Christ, we have gained more than sin has taken from mankind.

We can, as believers, participate in the full dream of God to have a triune being, loving and giving themselves to each other on a constant basis. When we understand that we get to be married to God and our spouse. Marriage can truly be a lovership for all of our days.

He truly empowers us to kill our sin nature and lovingly serve our spouse while dying to self. We can honestly participate in the lovership of God in marriage.

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