

# **‘Is My Marriage Toxic?’ 3 Ways You Can Know for Sure**

How bad is bad enough? When you are unhappily married that can be a difficult question. If you’re serious about following Jesus you are reluctant to consider leaving your marriage. But evil exists in our sinful world, even within marriage. And you may find yourself wondering, *Is my marriage toxic?*

As author and Bible teacher Gary Thomas describes, the Bible is in three acts. Act 1 is the way God originally intended things to be, glorious, in the Garden of Eden. Act 3 is the grand finale, when God remakes all things new. But Act 2 is the fall. Evil—horrible, humanity-destroying, virulent and aggressive evil—entered our world and is still here. Even though Satan is a defeated foe, we still live in a messed-up world until Jesus returns.

And the enemy rejoices when he can use the person closest to you to destroy you.

This is a hard topic. It’s one that most of us acknowledge intellectually, but don’t want to talk about. We don’t want to consider that such things could exist in the marriage of someone sitting next to us in church or even in our own marriage.

## **What We’re *Not* Talking About**

There is more than enough unhappiness to go around in marriage. Two sinners getting married is a setup for pain. Always. But that does not mean your marriage is toxic.

We are not talking about your spouse not meeting your needs. If your husband or wife is not engaging in sex with you that’s sad and needs to be worked on—but that’s not toxic. If your spouse does not show you the affection or respect you desire

and expect, your relationship needs help—but that’s not toxic. When your spouse doesn’t understand you, or won’t communicate, doesn’t support your career or is not similarly interested in growing spiritually as you are, those factors do not categorize your marriage as toxic.

Ask any couple who has remained successfully married for decades, and they will tell you marriage is hard. You will feel hurt or misunderstood. You may wonder if you married the wrong person. But persistence and growth can overcome so many problems. God can use your marriage to grow you, heal you and teach you how to love well.

But we must return to the reality that evil exists. Even within some marriages.

## **What *Is* Toxic?**

What makes evil evil?

Perhaps the most picturesque description is when Peter describes how Satan “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8, ESV).

Evil delights in destroying another. Evil takes pleasure in pain; the more pain evil can cause another, the happier evil is. Evil seeks to manipulate, control, corrupt, harm and demean. Evil seeks to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10, MEV).

And when you are married to a person who persistently behaves in an evil way or has a persistently evil heart, it will almost certainly destroy you.

We must be careful here. What superficially may be somewhat similar behaviors may or may not be evil. Your spouse *will* harm you. But if your spouse *delights* in harming you, that is evil. And if they consistently persist in that delight, your marriage is probably toxic.

And just because someone claims to be a Christian does not mean they are not toxic. Some of the most destructive manipulation and abuse happens in the name of God. How He must weep! When a husband (or a wife) uses Scripture to wound and control, demean and belittle, that is toxic. And a church leader or pastor who ignores true evil and recommends that the spouse seeking help stay only adds to that toxicity.

Just as important is whether or not the person is seeking repentance, healing, change and growth. God can heal and restore anyone and anything where He is given opportunity to do so! He has restored countless people and marriages that seemed impossible, marriages harmed by violence, addiction, abuse and more. But if the person persistently refuses to allow God to do His work, there are times He may be releasing you from this marriage.

## **Is My Marriage Toxic?**

There are no simple answers for someone facing a marriage that seems destructive. Sometimes God calls you to stay in a bad marriage. But I don't believe He calls you to stay in a marriage that is evil and toxic.

Making any decision about what to do next is not easy. Any simple answer would be inadequate. If you are facing such a circumstance, please get some expert help! This is an area where we must help each other in the body of Christ.

But briefly, ask yourself:

–Is my spouse acting out of an evil heart? (You will need God's perspective to assess this.)

–Does my spouse delight in causing harm?

–Is my spouse persistently refusing to change or seek help?

Marriages exist where the answer to those questions is Yes. That is tragic. God weeps. And I weep with you!

If that is the case for you, know that Jesus sees you. Get some help. It may be time to walk away. {eoa}

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