

This Destructive Force Can Cause Deep Wounds in Your Marriage

Small infractions caused by a couple's sins and unresolved conflicts during the course of a marriage create roadblocks to intimacy. The onslaught of trauma experienced by some couples causes deep, destructive rifts.

Neglect and abuse, which accompany addictions to alcohol, drugs, sex, food and work, can seriously damage the spouse married to an addict. Lies, empty promises and the rollercoaster rides that typify these addictive marriages create truly indescribable pain.

The scarring of physical and mental abuse causes more than just a buildup of painful events—it often causes legitimate rage. The effects of infidelity, past trauma and child abuse will most certainly traumatize any marriage, even those appearing to be very religious. Although such things “should” not happen in Christian marriages, I know they do.

On the other side of abuse is neglect. Neglect is more common in Christian marriages seeking help. Prayerlessness in a Christian couple's relationship is definitely a form of neglect. I cannot tell you how many women have come to my office over the years complaining about the lack of connection with their spouse.

Refusing to share your heart, coupled with an absence of prayer and praise over the decades, will create a silent anger, an internal rage within your spouse. This serious roadblock stunts the growth of trust and intimacy and can create real problems down the road for the couple who remains together.

Adulterous situations throw a spouse into a traumatic situation that he or she must then attempt to handle. To expect the spouse in an adulterous situation to simply move on and put the matter behind him or her minimizes the trauma. Adultery affects the spirit, soul and body, creating deep wounds in one or both spouses.

This type of wounding requires time to heal. Saying "I am sorry" will not make the pain disappear. I have personally experienced several traumas throughout my life prior to my marriage. My soul was wounded before I became married, so I am personally aware of how trauma affects the ability to be intimate.

In many relationships trust has been broken, decency has been violated and healing must take place in the soul of the wounded spouse. This individual is thrust into a paradoxical situation. Unfortunately, the person whom he or she loves the most may also be the one with whom he is most angry, and for good reason. This is an internal controversy that says "I love you" and "I'd like to pound you!" all at the same time.

If you are a wounded spouse, the perpetrator is responsible for your feelings. Yet the responsibility to heal is yours. If I happened to walk outside, and a sniper randomly shot me, I would be responsible to heal and repair from the damage of this event. I'm the one who would have to do what the doctor or physical therapist advised if I wanted to be restored. The following story will help make my point.

Jake and Fran are a couple who had been married for over 40 years. He drank some, and on a couple of occasions he physically abused Fran. They had children, and Jake became a workaholic. As a salesman he traveled three to five days a week, abandoning his wife with the children.

While Jake was traveling, he had several affairs that Fran found out about much later. Jake had a born-again experience

after their last child left home to attend college. He changed completely and began to live a genuine Christian life of integrity. Jake stopped traveling, and he and Fran began working at improving their marriage. Although both were Christians (she had prayed for him for years), they struggled with intimacy.

Jake protested, "She just won't forgive me for the past. I am a new creature now!" He cited 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Look, all things have become new."

Fran continued to feel stuck in her past feelings. She verbalized her forgiveness, but she still felt that she couldn't totally trust him and didn't appear to want to connect intimately with him.

Fran's past wounding needed to be healed before intimacy could take place. Such pain goes far deeper than merely seeking forgiveness for past offenses. This spouse needed support, not criticism, to get through this.

Alan and Barb were another wounded couple that needed healing.

Alan and Barb are a Christian couple with a middle-class income. In the earlier days of the marriage, Barb was an out-of-control shopper. Today she says, "I was definitely a shopaholic! I didn't even need the stuff that I would buy. I just shopped to try not to feel anything and to make myself feel better."

Barb constantly berated Alan, who was in his 20s at the time, because they couldn't afford the better car, a larger house and couldn't live like some of their 40-year-old friends who traveled all the time. She would shame him and was constantly critical of him. She conveyed the messages, "You're not good enough," "You'll never measure up" and "I'm not proud of you."

Alan really took these messages to heart! He spent more than

15 years climbing the ladder to success and rarely received praise for all of his hard work. Alan and Barb were both Christians during their entire marriage. Years later, Barb was convicted about her spending behavior, which she felt was an addiction. She went to therapy and group counseling and had not relapsed with shopping for a long time.

From the outside everything looked good. But on the inside Alan was distant, continued to mistrust his wife and did not feel loved by her. He stated he has tried many times to forgive her, but he still battles with outbursts of rage during which he will say regretful things to her and stay distant from her for days.

Alan had hidden anger. The wounds his wife inflicted on him had built up inside over the years. He was understandably angry about the painful events that took place in his marriage. He loved his wife, but he didn't feel as if he really liked her. Alan didn't want to deal with the trust issues he had involving Barb. He felt sorry following blowout arguments and truly wanted to know his wife the way Christ wants him to. Nevertheless, he kept hitting what he called "the wall." "I just can't let her in," he said in our counseling sessions.

Is Alan truly not forgiving Barb, or is he trying to punish her? I don't believe he is doing either. Alan experienced trauma throughout his years of marriage because of his wife's behavior and has internalized legitimate anger. This hidden anger (hidden even to Alan) is now a roadblock to intimacy with his wife, whom deep down he truly loves.

Anger is a familiar problem in many marriages, and it must be taken seriously as you strive to be intimate with your spouse. Only when wounds inside a relationship are identified and addressed biblically can healing begin to take place. When wounds are healed, a totally new level of intimacy can follow.

A spouse may have entered into a marriage with wounds from the past, and new wounds may occur during the marriage. In other marriages, both partners may be wounded. For example, when a husband and wife survive the same car accident, each may have his own physical bruises, bandages and pain. As they sleep together in the same bed, when one turns over, the other cries out in pain. Emotional pain responds the same.

Silent anger about your wounds can block intimacy, even when you long for it in your marriage. You can be healed from inner pain, regardless of the source. Once you identify the roadblock and take responsibility for your own healing, you can begin to move forward once again.

I have seen many courageous men and women identify and receive healing from the wounds that their spouses have inflicted on them. All forms of abuse, neglect, infidelity, addictions and shame can be successfully overcome with the desire to do so.

Regardless of the past, healing can take place. It requires work and patience, but the results are nothing short of marvelous.

As a Christian counselor, I have witnessed the healing of deep wounds and broken marriages. I have watched as couples reclaimed intimacy and once again became vibrant and sexually passionate. We serve a great God, and as a co-laborer with Him, all things are possible. {eo}

Doug Weiss, Ph.D., is a nationally known author, speaker and licensed psychologist. He is the executive director of Heart to Heart Counseling Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the author of several books, including 30 Day Marriage Makeover. You may contact Dr. Weiss via his website, ; on hisFacebook; by phone at 719-278-3708 or through email at heart2heart@.