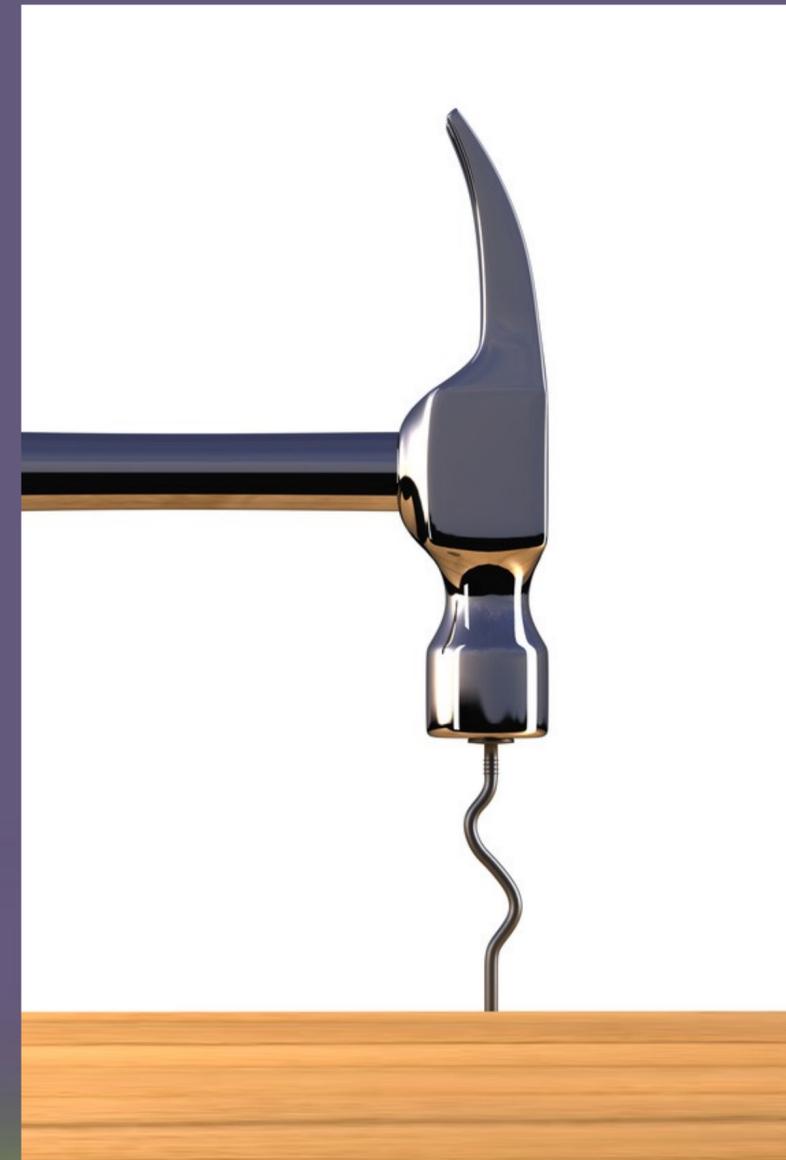


Thriving in a Failure-to-Thrive Marriage

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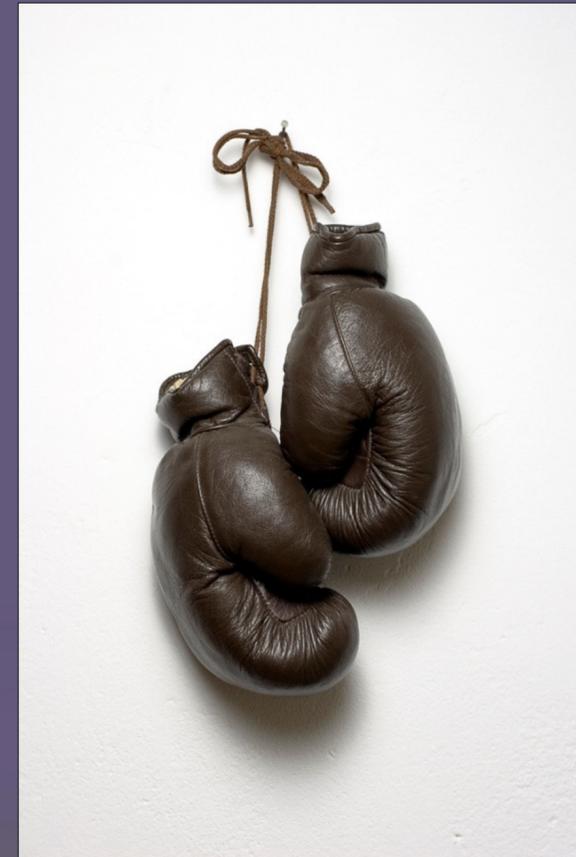
Beginning Assumptions

- Divorce is not a viable option
- Abuse is not part of the equation
- There is no biblical grounds for divorce
- You have chosen to remain in the marriage
- My language will be such that we are all in the same boat



How do I move toward someone who.....?

- Feels unsafe
- Is like an enemy
- Unkind
- Thinks ill of me
- Assumes motives
- Misunderstands me



Our Temptation

- Give up & get out
- Become self-protective
- Be a “fixer”
- Become cynical
- Become despairing/feel trapped
- Look outside the marriage for relief
- Become indifferent
- Envy what we think we see in other relationships



The Expectation of Return

In godly relationships, there is an anticipation of mutuality. Kindness, long-suffering, grace, forgiveness are all lived out in a reciprocal fashion.

Marriages thrive when you have two people committed to loving one another as Christ loved us. Mutual ministry is a hallmark of loving relationships.



However, the problem is when I begin to live out my relationships in a way that expects (demands) a return. I subtly begin to require my spouse to match my efforts.

My focus shifts from an anticipation of something good to a demand for it. It becomes the reason I do or don't do things for my spouse, and it begins to inform my reactions.

James 4:1-3

¹ What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Our Struggle

- Any agenda for change must focus first on me and let go of changing my spouse
- Dying to the mentality that I deserve happiness, good circumstances, a decent marriage now.
- Striving for more than a sense of duty by remaining in the marriage.

“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
2 Corinthians 12:10



“A Perfect man would never act out of a sense of duty; he’d always want the right thing more than the wrong one. Duty is only a substitute for love (of God and other people) like a crutch is a substitute for a leg. Most of us need the crutch at times, but of course it is idiotic to sue the crutch when our own legs (our own loves, tastes, habits, etc) can do the journey on their own.”

C.S. Lewis

Redefining Hope

- Hope cannot be found in a guarantee that my marriage will flourish or my spouse will change.
- You don't give up hope of a better marriage, neither do you make it your foundation for hope/happiness.
- Hope is found in a Person, Jesus, rather than my circumstances.
- Hope is found in thriving as a person even if my marriage never does.
- A failure-to-thrive marriage does not mean you are a failure
- Joy can be found in the morning...."His mercies are new every morning."

Hope

The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.

I will praise the Lord who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me...

Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Psalm 16:6-8

Christ as our model

- He experienced the brokenness of relationships
- He did not fix everything that was broken
- He came to serve, not to be served
- He spoke honestly and purposefully in conflict
- He did not allow the opinions of others to influence him
- He looked to his father for comfort and wisdom (the garden)

Throwing away our armor

“There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.

I believe that the most lawless and inordinate loves are less contrary to God’s will than self-invited and self-protective lovelessness...We shall draw nearer to God, not by trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him; throwing away all defensive armour. If our hearts need to be broken, and if He chooses this as a way in which they should break, so be it.”

C.S. Lewis – from *The Four Loves*

Our Commitment to Marriage

- Finding rest in Christ, not my marriage
- I will not treat you as your sins deserve
- I will choose to love you over guarding myself/self-protection
- I will actively pursue loving my spouse. I won't withhold good from them.
- I will look for ways to delight in my marriage

- Be free from bitterness, despair, criticism
- Be wise in how you interpret your spouse's behavior—give the benefit of the doubt
- Look for ways to build up
- Put aside your desire to help them “get it”
- Give grace and mercy
- Model kindness and grace before your children and the world
- Forgive

Defining Contentment

“Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.”

The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

Jeremiah Burroughs

We are aiming for:

- “Give us our daily bread” – We live our marriage out day by day and God gives grace for the moment.
- Strive for something more than dutiful effort.
- Wisdom is needed: it is from above, pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering without hypocrisy (James 3:16-17)

- Pursue others to pray for you and your spouse
- Ask for accountability. Let others honestly speak into your world & struggles.
- Pursue counseling as a support, when needed.
- Pursue relationships that encourage growth in your marriage.
- Speak in gracious ways about your spouse

- Accept that you cannot, should not, and will not fix everything
- “I have learned in whatever situation I am in to be content.” Philippians 4:11
- Look for small steps that build what is broken or lacking, or simply what you would like to grow.
- Speak boldly and graciously when called for. Don’t allow fear of your spouse’s reactions to prevent you from engaging truthfully and lovingly

On forgiveness:

“He (Jesus) told the people their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offenses. This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin.”

– C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity*

Resources in the body of Christ

- Don't be an island. Surround yourself with support and accountability. It is not a luxury, but a necessity.
- Look for support for your spouse—support groups, accountability, counseling
- Consider mentors, resources for your children
- Commit to modeling and living in community as a way of encouraging and building your marriage, spouse, children and yourself.

Q and A

