

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there are sand dunes. A wooden fence made of vertical slats and horizontal rails runs across the middle ground. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The title and author's name are overlaid on this image.

LESLIE VERNICK

“Packed with the kind of solid practical wisdom and bracing straight talk women need.” —CAROLYN CUSTIS JAMES

How to
Find Your Voice
and Reclaim
Your Hope

The Emotionally Destructive Marriage

- Moving Toward Healing
- Deciding Whether to Stay or Go
- Breaking Free from Damaging Patterns

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WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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THE EMOTIONALLY DESTRUCTIVE MARRIAGE

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Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author's added emphasis.

Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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To the three most honorable men I know:

Richard, my father

Howard, my husband

Ryan, my son

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made my manuscript a much better book. Thank you for all your efforts. To my publisher, WaterBrook Multnomah, I am deeply appreciative for your believing in the importance of this topic and publishing this book. I am also grateful to the men and women who have allowed me to walk beside them in their shattered lives and marriages. You have taught me so much.

Lastly, God, without you I would have nothing to say. You hate injustice and abuse, and it breaks your heart to see it happening within families and in your church. Thank you for giving me the privilege of speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Hanging On by a Thread

It's easy to find a plethora of good books about how to be a godly wife or what steps to take to build a successful and happy marriage. There aren't many books written on how to wisely deal with a destructive and abusive marriage. As a counselor and coach, I have grown increasingly troubled by the advice hurting women receive from well-meaning pastors, Christian counselors, friends, and lay leaders when they seek help for their destructive and abusive marriages. Many times we've not understood the gravity of the problem. We've misdiagnosed a marriage that has terminal cancer and treated it as if it were only suffering from a common cold. We've also misplaced the responsibility for keeping the marriage alive by putting an extraordinarily heavy burden on a wife's shoulders to somehow maintain a loving and warm relationship with a husband who treats her with cruelty, disrespect, deceit, and gross indifference. It's not feasible, nor is it biblical.

Each week e-mails flood my inbox from women desperate for answers, hanging on to their marriages and sometimes their sanity by a single thread. The details vary, but the questions are usually the same: "What do I do?" and "Where do I turn for help?" The woman's spirit, and sometimes her body, is depressed and depleted from the distress she feels within the walls of her own home. She wants to honor God and do

his will, but does that mean she must continue to allow herself to be destroyed by her husband, a man who has promised to love and protect her?

Marriage and family are important to God, but just as important to him are the individuals within those marriages and families. God does not value men more than women, or the institution of marriage more than the people who are in it. He wants to help you know how to heal and what to do to bring true restoration to your destructive marriage. He also knows that because of the hardness of your husband's heart, true reconciliation of your relationship isn't always possible.

Throughout this book you will clearly see what's wrong and why keeping the marriage together at all costs or at any price can be dangerous. You will gain fresh insights and a new paradigm in which to understand your role in your marriage. You'll learn strategies and be given tools so that you can find your own voice again and be able to develop the strength and courage to stand up against the destruction. Within these pages is a biblical road map to help you know whether genuine repentance and restoration is taking place, and what the specific steps are to get there.

The Emotionally Destructive Marriage is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Seeing Your Marriage Clearly," will help you distinguish the difference between a disappointing marriage and a destructive one. At the end of chapter 1, there is a self-administered test you can take to determine whether you are in a destructive marriage. In chapter 2 you will learn what a healthy marriage looks like and the three essential ingredients that are required for any relationship to flourish. Chapter 3 will open your eyes to the different types of destructive relationship patterns and why they are so damaging to you, your children, and your marriage. In chapter 4 you will see that God hates what's happening to you. He is with you and for you and wants to help you make changes so that genuine healing can take place.

Part 2, "Change Begins with You," opens with chapter 5 showing

you the ways you may be unknowingly enabling the destruction in your marriage to continue. You will understand how being a true biblical help-mate is very different than staying inappropriately submissive and silent about the destruction. In chapter 6 you'll understand why trying harder in the traditional wifely ways will make a destructive marriage worse and how the common teachings on biblical headship and submission can lead to an abuse of power and entitlement thinking. Chapter 7 will help you build internal core strength, so that when the time is right, you will be empowered to take firm yet godly action to protect yourself and your children. Then, in chapter 8, you will know exactly what you need to do to prepare before you have a difficult conversation with your husband about his destructive behaviors.

In part 3, "Initiating Changes in Your Marriage," you'll be given specific strategies to wake up your husband to his destructiveness and invite him to godly change. In chapter 9 you'll discover how to speak up in love, using words that invite your spouse to stop his destructive behaviors and attitudes without shaming, scolding, or disrespecting him. In chapter 10 you will receive a plan on how to calmly confront your husband, together with examples of specific consequences you can implement if he refuses to listen. Chapter 11 takes you step by step through your biblical options if nothing changes in your marriage, and ways you can stay strong and God-centered in the midst of continued destructive behaviors. Lastly, in chapters 12 and 13, you'll learn the specific changes that are required if a destructive marriage is to heal, and how you will know whether or not you're making progress as a couple. In the closing epilogue, I invite you to read the words of an abusive man who is learning to become a better man.

I debated whether to write this book just for women or to include men, as they, too, are in destructive marriages and feel distraught, impotent, and confused about how to change the damaging dynamics in their

marriages. In the end I decided to write this book for women, but if you are a man who is looking for answers for your destructive marriage, you will find help within the pages here if you can overlook the stories and illustrations depicting men as the primary perpetrators. You can also find additional resources at www.leslievernick.com/the-emotionally-destructive-marriage, if your wife is the one who is the destructive partner.

The individuals in each story are disguised except for those who have given me permission to use their real names. Some stories or characters are composites to illustrate a specific point. All are pictures of the painful realities some women must live with day after day, week after week, year after year.

Please hear me: God doesn't want you to hang on by a thread, my friend. He gives you a lifeline. Grab hold of it and live.

PART 1

Seeing Your Marriage Clearly

The eye is the lamp of the body.
So, if your eye is healthy, your
whole body will be full of light,
but if your eye is bad, your whole
body will be full of darkness. If
then the light in you is darkness,
how great is the darkness!

Jesus, in Matthew 6:22–23

Are You in an Emotionally Destructive Marriage?

For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest;
nor is anything secret except to come to light.

—Mark 4:22

Several years ago, while speaking in Hungary, I was shocked to see the new title the Hungarians had given one of my books when they translated it into their language. It was now called *How to Survive a D-Minus Marriage*. My sister, Patt, who had accompanied me on this speaking trip, joked with me about whether or not people would admit their marriages were that bad. But during the event, the book sold like hot cakes. Marriages everywhere are in dire straits. Christian homes are no exception.

You may feel as if you are in a D-minus marriage and have no idea what to do. I have help for you, but first it's important to clarify the difference between a disappointing marriage and a destructive one.

A DISAPPOINTING MARRIAGE

Anna perched on the edge of her chair, her hands folded neatly in her lap. When I asked her to tell me why she'd come to see me, tears sprung to her

eyes. Embarrassed, she grabbed a tissue and dabbed her lashes so her mascara wouldn't run. "I don't know why I'm crying," Anna stammered, her lip trembling. "I should be happy. I have a great life. My husband is good with the girls, generously provides for our family, and is overall a nice guy."

"So what's the problem?" I asked.

"I guess I thought we'd have more of a connection. I don't feel that spark for him. I don't know if I ever did. And...maybe...I wonder if I had waited, I could I have done better. Now I dread the thought of spending the rest of my life with him."

As Anna and I talked, I learned she grew up in a tumultuous home filled with chaos and conflict. When she met Mark, he personified stability, strength, and security—something Anna never experienced growing up. Mark was a committed Christian, which in Anna's mind made him magnificent husband material. She loved being taken care of and feeling safe, but she hadn't considered some of his other qualities like his reserved nature, his quietness, and his lack of adventure. And now, although she's snug and secure, she feels lonely, bored, and trapped.

Anna's marriage is not destructive, but it is disappointing and painful for her. She's not sure how to continue or even if she wants to. Yet she knows to end her marriage for these reasons would crush Mark and her children, as well as dishonor her vows to God and to her husband. Anna feels vulnerable and confused and miserable. She wants to trust God, and yet she desperately wants to be happy in a great relationship. She can't imagine having that with Mark.

A DESTRUCTIVE MARRIAGE

Like Anna, Carol was miserable in her marriage but for completely different reasons. Carol was pacing back and forth in my office, her mascara smeared from crying, desperate for answers.

“Leslie, I don’t know how to live this way anymore. My husband tells me I’m fat, worthless, and lazy. He mocks me and makes fun of me when I cry or get mad. I don’t know what to do when he tells the children they don’t have to listen to me or that I’m too stupid to help them with their homework. And sex! I’m not even going to go there, but let me just say this much, if I’m not interested, I have to listen to how screwed up I am or how every woman would love to do the things he wants to do.

“I’ve gone to my pastor for help, and although he seems sympathetic, all he tells me is to trust God and try harder to submit and love my husband. I feel crazy inside. I already know God says I’m supposed to submit. But how? How do I submit to someone who is irresponsible with our money? How do I submit to someone who acts like he hates me? How do I feel any kind of love for a man who emotionally batters me and sexually degrades me?”

I said, “You can’t.”

“I can’t?” Carol stopped pacing and sunk down into a chair, her eyes riveted on mine.

I smiled. “You can’t. You are in a living nightmare. You’re not wrong for feeling angry and hurt. God hates the way your husband treats you. It’s evil.”

“Then what do I do?” Carol asked.

“Carol, it is impossible to love your husband in a warm and wifely way right now, but God does want you to love him, even if he feels like your enemy. What this kind of love looks like in your situation is something we’ll work on together. However, I want you to hear this important truth. Biblically loving your husband doesn’t require you to prop him up in order to enable him to continue to hurt you. It involves something far more redemptive.”

Like Anna, Carol is in a D-minus marriage. But Carol’s relationship isn’t just disappointing; it is destructive. Her husband not only hurts her

feelings, but he consistently degrades her personhood and devalues her voice. He rejects her as a biblical helpmate and uses her as an object to meet his sexual desires. His actions and attitudes toward Carol are not just sinful; they are destructive. They tear her down and inhibit her growth. This is toxic not only to Carol but also to him as a man and to their children who observe how their father treats their mother day in and day out. (In chapter 3, I'll describe additional attitudes and behaviors that are destructive to the marriage and to the individuals in them.)

Biblically loving your husband doesn't require you to prop him up in order to enable him to continue to hurt you. It involves something far more redemptive.

Carol's unhappiness and Anna's unhappiness are for different reasons, but God cherishes both women and their families. Anna is not in a destructive marriage, but she is in a disappointing one. In our feel-good and entitlement culture, more and more Christian men and women are abandoning their marriages for the simple reason that "I want more" or "I'm not happy." Anna's unhappiness is like a sore in her soul that she must tend to if she wants it to heal. If she continues to pick at it, it will become inflamed—perhaps infected—and will affect her marriage and her whole person. Her unhappiness could become destructive if she acts out by having an affair or divorcing her husband simply because she's lonely or bored.

Every marriage goes through seasons of closeness and separateness, happy times and hard times. After thirty-eight years of marriage to the same man and more than thirty-five years of counseling hundreds of couples, I've learned that good marriages don't just happen, even if partners were madly in love when they first got married. It is in marriage,

more than any other relationship, where we come face to face with the best in ourselves and the absolute worst in ourselves, as well as the best and the worst in our spouse. How we do—or do not—face this awareness and respond to it becomes the running theme of our marital and personal story and will determine the success or failure of our marriage, and much of our life.

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

Whenever I do a radio or television interview on the topic of emotionally destructive relationships, the moderator always says something like, “We all do hurtful things at times to people. We all make mistakes and do or say things we regret. When is the line crossed? When does it become destructive? How do you define emotional abuse?”

Emotional abuse systematically degrades, diminishes, and can eventually destroy the personhood of the abused. Most people describe emotional abuse as being far more painful and traumatic than physical abuse. One only has to read reports of prisoners of war to begin to understand the traumatic effects of psychological warfare using emotionally abusive tactics—and this is when the behavior is perpetrated by one’s enemy. When the abusive behavior is perpetrated by someone who promises to love and cherish you, it is even more devastating and destructive.

Destructive behaviors and attitudes can sometimes be difficult to describe succinctly. That’s why an emotionally destructive marriage is not usually diagnosed by looking at a single episode of sinful behavior (which we’re all capable of), but rather repetitive attitudes and behaviors that result in tearing someone down or inhibiting her growth. This behavior is usually accompanied by a lack of awareness, a lack of responsibility, and a lack of change.

Let's look at another example of a relationship that at first might seem disappointing, but when we look at the big picture, we clearly see it is destructive.

The sun shone on Sarah's shoulders—the warmth stoking her hope that today they'd enjoy one another as a family while spending the day at the water park. Jason and Sarah's marriage was on shaky ground, and their three children were feeling the impact. But they'd begun seeing a marriage counselor, and Sarah hoped things might soon change.

There wasn't one big hurt in their relationship like an affair or a beating, but rather an accumulation of many smaller hurts—like when Jason repeatedly took his sister's side in family arguments and sarcastically made fun of Sarah's perspective. Or when Jason continued to allow his parents to enter their home without first calling or knocking, even though Sarah told him how much it bothered her. Or when Jason humiliated her at a family picnic, mocking her and calling her names, and then drove home without her, leaving her stranded. Or when she asked him to trim the bushes and he cut them all down to stubs, even her favorite lilacs. When she protested, he told her they were too much work. Like a thousand bee stings, Jason's offenses over time poisoned Sarah's joy, broke her heart, and crushed her spirit. She grew tired of asking to be heard, hoping to be valued, wanting to be loved.

Floating down the lazy-river ride, all five of them in their own tubes, Sarah turned to Jason and smiled. "I'm so glad we could come here as a family." As she noticed the waterfall ahead, she said, "Uh-oh, I hope I don't get stuck under those falls. I hate that."

Sure enough, Sarah got caught under the falls. For fifteen long seconds, buckets of water pummeled her head as she furiously tried to paddle away. Finally she broke free. Gasping for air, she said, "Sheesh, I can't believe my bad luck."

Jason smiled. They continued floating down the river.

Rounding the corner Sarah saw another waterfall ahead. “Oh no! I do not want to get stuck again.”

But for the second time, Sarah’s tube lodged directly under the pounding falls. After she escaped, she glared at Jason and asked, “Are *you* doing this?”

“No,” he said. “I wouldn’t do that to you.”

When Sarah’s tube stalled under the third waterfall, she put the pieces together. Jason had lodged his big toe under her float and kept her trapped under the falls until he decided to let go. Furious, she jumped out of her tube screaming, “How could you do that to me? I can’t believe you lied.”

Jason laughed. “Calm down. Don’t you think you’re overreacting? You get wet at a water park. Can’t you have a little fun?”

If Sarah and Jason discussed this incident in a future counseling session, their counselor or pastor might focus on why this bothered Sarah so much. After all, a couple often teases and frolics around with each other. Why was that so offensive to her? Or the counselor might zero in on Jason’s immaturity and help him see you don’t have fun at another person’s expense, even if you’re at a water park together. The counselor or pastor might also turn to Sarah and encourage her to let it go, lighten up, or forgive her husband and not hold a grudge. Problem solved—marriage better.

Not true. That approach would be like giving antibiotics to a patient who has lung cancer or an aspirin to someone who is allergic to bee stings. Without a more potent treatment plan, the marriage will die (even if the couple stays legally married).

If we had a wide-angle lens and could look at Jason and Sarah’s marriage over the years, we’d see a different picture. The problem with their marriage isn’t that Jason is immature and doesn’t realize that his playfulness bothers Sarah. Or that Sarah is uptight and overreacts to Jason’s

attempts to have fun (although both might be true). If we could look over their marital history, we'd see that Jason has consistently been indifferent to what bothers Sarah, and is sometimes intentionally cruel. In spite of what he says, Sarah has no voice or value to him other than being a mother to his children, a maid for the household chores, and a body for sex. He has repeatedly demonstrated that Sarah's feelings, needs, thoughts, or desires don't play a significant part in his decision making. Jason does what Jason wants to do, even when it's at Sarah's expense. That is not playful or merely selfish and immature. When it happens over and over again, despite someone's repeated protests, it is abusive and destructive.

Every marriage has the potential to become destructive because we all are naturally selfish and prideful. Every married couple experiences some frustrations, hurts, unfulfilled expectations, unrealized dreams, and unhappiness throughout their relationship. How we respond to those disappointments can mature us and draw us closer to God and to one another, or we can let those disappointments destroy us and our marriage.

But there are women with marriages like Carol's and Sarah's in every community, in every church. Perhaps you know her. Maybe you are her. Sarah and Carol would be the first to admit they are not perfect wives, but God does not want them to be mocked, sexually humiliated, ignored, verbally battered, lied to, or disrespected. God has a much more glorious answer for these women's lives than "submit and try harder to be a good wife."

HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR MARRIAGE?

Amy Grant sang a song called "If These Walls Could Speak." If the walls in your home could speak today, what story would they tell about your

marriage? How would they describe your friendship with your husband? your sexual relationship? how you handle differences and conflict? how you make up after a fight? your finances? how you make decisions together? your spiritual journey?

When it comes to destructive marriages, it can be quite painful and ugly to see something clearly enough to put it into words. Listen to some of the words other women have used to describe the way they feel in their marriages:

I can't be his wife and me at the same time. It's either one or the other. In order to stay married to him, I have to stop being me.

We'd get along fine if I never questioned him and always went along with everything he wanted.

Every ounce of mental and emotional energy I have is needed to survive living in this marriage. He's so harsh and negative toward everyone and everything I feel like I can't breathe.

I don't feel safe. His words cut me like a knife. He treats me like I'm his enemy, yet he expects me to want to have sex with him whenever he wants it.

I don't know how I can keep living like this. The rules never apply to him, only to me.

Conversations never end. He lectures us and lectures us until we give in and see things his way.

It's always about him, how he feels, what he needs, how he's hurt. There is never any consideration for my feelings, my needs, or my hurts. I exist solely to please him, serve him, and make him happy.

I'm tired of being his mother. He takes no responsibility for anything but constantly blames and criticizes me for everything that goes wrong. Nothing is ever his fault.

I feel like I'm treading water, barely keeping afloat, and he keeps knocking me under. Someday I won't be able to come back up.

I don't know how to live like this anymore. It's either divorce or suicide.

These women did not reach these conclusions after only a single episode of destructive or selfish behavior but after years of repetitive sinful actions and attitudes that their husbands have refused to change. For some women it takes a long time to recognize what's happening, especially if their family of origin contained similar attitudes and behaviors. Maybe you have experienced this.

Other times you can't put what's happening to you into words, but you know something's not right because when you're around your husband, your body feels it. Your stomach churns, your teeth grind, your hands clench, your jaw tightens, your head pounds, your legs shake, and your blood pressure rises. You cry, you can't catch your breath, and you throw up.

Your body is telling you something's wrong. Pay attention.

Sometimes seeing and naming what's wrong can be frightening. I was teaching at a professional counselors' seminar on destructive relation-

ships when one of the participants asked me if she could speak to me privately. During the break we met, and Sherrie shared her story, one that she had never told a single soul before then. While she talked, Sherrie stared at her hands the entire time. When she was finished, she looked up and said, “Just saying it out loud, hearing my own story, I’d say it sounds kind of crazy, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it does,” I said.

Before that moment of personal honesty, Sherrie had been telling herself a lie. She was telling herself that things in her marriage weren’t that bad. That it was *her* problem. That she was overreacting or being too sensitive to what her husband was doing and saying. But once she spoke aloud what was happening at home, she clearly saw the destruction in her marriage. Once we “see” something, name it, or write it down, it’s much harder to deny it to ourselves. Annie Dillard wrote, “Seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalization. Unless I call my attention to what passes before my eyes, I simply won’t see it.... I have to say the words, describe what I’m seeing.”¹

I know you understand there is no perfect marriage or perfect husband. The Bible tells us that “we all stumble in many ways” (James 3:2, NIV). Yet, if we want a successful long-term marriage or are going to put the effort into attempting to change an unhappy or destructive one, we must start by naming what we see correctly.

You’ve picked up this book and read this far for a reason. Remember, Jesus tells us, “If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light” (Matthew 6:22). It’s crucial to your well-being as well as to your family’s future for you to open your eyes right now in order to see clearly where you are if you want to change where you’re going in the future.

Before reading further, I’d like you to take a moment right now and take this quiz. It will help you see if you’re in an emotionally destructive marriage.

ARE YOU IN AN EMOTIONALLY DESTRUCTIVE MARRIAGE?

1. My spouse calls me names, such as *stupid* or *worthless*, or uses sexually degrading terms.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

2. My spouse mocks and belittles me.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

3. My spouse tells me no one else would ever want me as a partner.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

4. My spouse pressures me to do things I do not want to do.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

5. My spouse threatens to leave me and take the children.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

6. My spouse uses the Bible to criticize me or to get me to do something he wants me to do.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

7. My spouse tells me who I may have as friends.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

8. My spouse dictates how often I can see/talk with my family of origin.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

9. My spouse undermines me with our children.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

10. My spouse speaks poorly about me to our children.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

11. My spouse speaks poorly about me to others (his family, friends, neighbors, church people).

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

12. I don't feel free to challenge my husband or disagree with him.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

13. If I don't agree with my husband or do what he wants, I have a price to pay.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

14. My spouse breaks things around the house when he's angry or upset.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

15. My spouse screams and curses at me.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

16. When I tell my husband my deepest feelings, he laughs at me, ignores me, or uses them against me.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

17. My spouse disregards my needs.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

18. My spouse tells me I can't live without him.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

19. My spouse badgers me until I give in to his demands.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

20. My spouse calls or texts me frequently wanting to know where I am, what I am doing, and who I am with.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

21. My spouse monitors my e-mails, social-media, and Internet use.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

22. My spouse accuses me of things I did not do.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

23. My spouse demands my attention when I'm busy with something or someone else.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

24. My spouse does not like it when I get positive attention or affirmation from other people—friends, family, church, work.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

25. My spouse tells me I cannot tell anyone what happens between us.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

26. My spouse uses sarcasm and ridicule to get me to stop talking or to change my mind about something.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

27. My spouse refuses to listen to my point of view.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

28. My spouse blows up when I ask questions about why he did something.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

29. My spouse physically restrains me to keep me from leaving a volatile situation.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

30. My spouse has threatened to harm me.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

31. My spouse uses physical force to get me to do something he wants me to do or to stop doing something he doesn't want me to do.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

32. My spouse has injured me.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

33. My spouse threatens to harm things that are important to me (children, pets, reputation, and property).

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

34. My spouse uses physical force to coerce me sexually.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

35. My spouse withdraws from me if I don't do what he wants.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

36. My spouse refuses to respond when I ask him questions.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

37. My spouse changes the subject when I try to bring up something that's bothering me.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

38. My spouse ignores me for long periods of time.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

39. My spouse refuses to engage or participate in everyday family life.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

40. My spouse plays mind games with me.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

41. My spouse tells me that he's the one who is being mistreated by me.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

42. My spouse says the problems in our marriage are all my fault.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

43. My spouse acts one way in public and another way at home.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

44. There is a double standard around what's acceptable behavior.

He gives himself more leeway than he gives me.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

45. My spouse refuses to tell me how much money he earns.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

46. I have no voice regarding how our finances are saved or spent.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

47. I have no idea what my husband does with our money even though I've asked.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

48. My spouse tells me things that I know are not true.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

49. My spouse omits information that keeps me from knowing the whole story about something.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

50. My spouse lies to other people (children, work colleagues, friends, church, family, IRS, police, etc.).

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

51. I feel crazy in my marriage.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

52. I feel trapped in my marriage.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

53. I don't feel I can be myself in my marriage.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

54. I feel like a child in my marriage.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

55. I feel like his mother in my marriage.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

56. I feel tense around my spouse.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

57. I feel angry around my spouse.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

58. I feel afraid of my spouse.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

59. My children are afraid of my spouse.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

60. I feel physically ill around my spouse.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

61. I am using medications, excess food, and/or alcohol to cope with my marriage.

Often Sometimes Seldom Never

If you answered the last eleven questions (51–61) with *Often* and *Sometimes*, your marriage is taking a toll on you and it's important that you not ignore what's happening to you.

Go back through your answers to questions 1–50 and see how many questions you answered with *Often* and *Sometimes*. What do you see? What's the pattern, the big picture? If you answered more than two questions with *Often*, your marriage may become or is becoming destructive. If you answered *Often* for more than five questions, it is definitely destructive. If you answered *Sometimes* and *Seldom* for some or many of the questions but did not circle *Often*, your marriage is or is becoming destructive. Please take action now before things get worse. In chapter 3 I will go into more detail about the different types of destructive relationships and why they are destructive. Here is a breakdown of what the questions look for.

Questions 1–28 describe the various characteristics in an emotionally abusive relationship. Belittling, humiliating, badgering, controlling, undermining, and threatening are obvious characteristics of emotional abuse.

Questions 20–24 indicate jealousy and inappropriate dependency, which lead to being destructive.

Questions 28–34 describe physically abusive tactics used to express displeasure or to force someone to do something she does not want to do. Threats to harm are considered abusive. This is controlling abuse.

Questions 35–39 look for more covert indicators of emotional abuse. They aren't as obvious as some of the other tactics used to control, but they are effective. They also indicate gross indifference to the feelings and needs of the spouse, which is destructive to a marriage.

Questions 40–44 describe the vague area of crazy-making where you can't define what is abusive, but the mind games, the refusal to engage, and the blaming leave you confused and uncertain.

Questions 45–47 describe coercive control with respect to the family finances.

Questions 48–50 describe deceit, which breaks trust and destroys the very foundation of marriage.

Questions 51–61 look for your responses to what's happening in your marriage. Some individuals may be more resilient to some of these destructive behaviors, others not. Don't compare yourself with anyone else who may be able to live with something when your body and your spirit are breaking down.

In summary, an emotionally destructive marriage is one where one's personhood, dignity, and freedom of choice is regularly denied, criticized, or crushed. This can be done through words, behaviors, economics, attitudes, and misusing the Scriptures.

An emotionally destructive marriage is one where one's personhood, dignity, and freedom of choice is regularly denied, criticized, or crushed. This can be done through words, behaviors, economics, attitudes, and misusing the Scriptures.

Taking the quiz and answering the questions was tough, but it also may have provided a bit of relief to see more clearly what's going on. If you've ever been lost in a bad place and have no idea where you are, it's a terrifying feeling. If you want to find your way out, you start by seeing where you are right now. Believe me. No one wants to be in a destructive marriage. But hope for change is birthed when you can see clearly where you are and where you need to go. Only when you do that can you take the first step.

Don't despair. I'm going to give you a map to follow. With God's help, you will find your way through.

Dear God,

Sometimes I'm afraid to open my eyes and see what's going on in my home. I don't want to know. It scares me. But I want to trust you with my life, my children, and my marriage. I want to believe that you see what's going on and you want it to stop. I want to know your wisdom and your ways so that I am not destroyed by the pain I'm in. Help me, God, take one step at a time.

Action Step: Buy yourself a journal and begin to process what you see about your marriage from reading this chapter and taking the test. Be as honest with yourself as you know how. This is essential if you want to know where you are. If you are worried that your husband might read your journal, you can write in a password-protected file on your computer. If you answered *Often* on many of the questions, it's important that you start to document what's going on for your own protection. Please read about how to do that in chapter 8.



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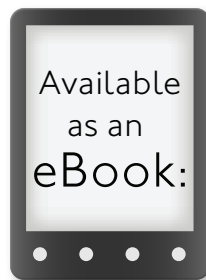
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