Should I Stay or Should I Go?

How to Know if You’re Making the Right Decision
Introduction: When I Faced the Decision Myself
Chapter One: How Did We Get Here?
Chapter Two: The Challenges of Staying for the Children
Chapter Three: What Keeps Us Stuck?
Chapter Four: The Power of Owning Our Role
Chapter Five: Can I Fix My Marriage by Myself?
Ready to Find Your Answers?
Who I Am.
“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”
Anaïs Nin
When I Faced the Decision Myself

I was in a marriage to a nice, handsome, good man. He was responsible and hard-working. He worked out four days a week religiously, ironed his clothes for the week every Sunday evening and packed his lunch for work each night before going to bed. He was kind and honest. He was also safe; I knew he would never hurt me.

Our relationship was one of low-drama, but also one of low-connection, low-intimacy and low-affection; so it was a marriage that was good enough.

We had a beautiful four-bedroom home in a suburban golf community, we had nice cars, took vacations; we had plenty of friends and supportive families. We had everything we were supposed to have, so why wasn’t I happy?
I didn’t have anyone at that time that could help me navigate this terrain, to help me understand my unhappiness. I wasn’t a life coach then and didn’t have any tools, so the journey to discovering my answers was much longer and more difficult than it needed to be.

I wanted everyone to believe that I had the world by the tail and that everything in my life was picture-perfect. But, clearly it was not. I had been faking it.

Around the seventh year of our marriage, I began to change and what I wanted also changed. I would notice other couples and how affectionate they were and how connected they appeared to be and I wanted that for myself. I began to ask my husband for affection, but honestly he didn’t know how to give it and I didn’t know how to receive it. So it was just awkward. For several years I was able to convince myself that he had enough other good qualities and that I should just live without affection, deep connection and intimacy in my life. And that worked for a while, until it didn’t.

When we’re struggling in our relationships with affection and connection, many times there is someone else that’s willing to step into that role for us and show us what we’re missing. They’re there to wake us up or to help us see that what our hearts long for is possible. That was my story, but it is also the story of many of my clients.

Although that’s not something I’m proud of, it became the catalyst for the most profound growth period of my life and there were many lessons I still needed to learn.

After 11 years, my marriage ended.
No Simple Answers

There wasn’t a simple answer to the most difficult question in my life. And there was no way to answer that question without either denying my needs or hurting my husband. There was no answer that friends and family could understand, much less approve of.

But that’s how it is with the most important questions of our lives, isn’t it?

These questions demand attention and crave clarity.

These questions keep whispering to us, over time becoming louder and louder.

But most of all, these questions want the right answer to be made.

But the right decision for one person will look completely different for someone else.

And although there are plenty of people out there that will tell you that the right thing to do is to stay together... no matter how miserable you make one another...

There are also others that will tell you that you – just like all of us – have the right to be happy.
Your Answers...Your Life

The answer for me in my marriage ultimately led to a separation and dissolution. But that was my decision for my life.

We each get to create our own experiences in this life, so my answer may or may not be the same as your answer. And there are no wrong answers, except not answering.

I am now happier than I even knew was possible. I am remarried to an incredible man, but more importantly I no longer look to my partner to make me happy and take total responsibility for that myself.

There was so much I didn’t know all those years ago. And no one ever taught us how to be in a healthy, loving, lasting relationship with one another.

As a truth-telling Love Coach, I never tell my clients what to do. For one thing, it doesn’t work; but for another, the way you would live your life might be very different than the way I would live your life. So, I will not tell you what to do, but I will help guide you to your decision for your life, for your heart and for your marriage...one that you won’t second-guess or regret.

There are no wrong answers, except not answering.
Chapter One: How Did We Get Here?

“It’s only when we walk back from the canvas that we can see the larger picture.”
Pico Iyer, 2015 speech at USC

Sandy and her husband David loved their three children dearly, but being a parent is one of the most selfless acts there is and with three kids, it seemed like life never seemed to slow down for them. Sandy and David would dream together about how easy life would be once the kids were grown and on their own, leaving the two of them the freedom to cultivate their interests, to travel more or to simply enjoy an occasional afternoon of peace and quiet. They had plans for a home that would be paid off, scaling back at work and weekends with grandbabies.

But those talks seem so long ago now...

Sandy and David share no real affection or emotional connection. They communicate mostly about the necessities in order to keep the kids running, the bills paid and dinner on the table.
Occasionally, David complains that they’re not having sex very often but he has also learned that bringing that up usually leads to an argument. Sandy feels increasingly alone as the distance between she and David grows wider and deeper. He wants affection, but is unable to emotionally connect with her. She can’t give affection without feeling emotionally connected. It becomes a never-ending cycle of pain and loneliness, anger and disconnection. Neither is getting what they need in the relationship and neither feels able to meet the needs of their partner.

A Marriage on Auto-Pilot & Being Fine with Fine.

When Sandy and David started out in their marriage they did what most of us did. They established themselves in their careers, they bought a home and then within a few years began having children. Their lives centered around their jobs, taking care of the kids and taking care of the home.

As their kids grew older, they signed them up for multiple sports and additional classes. The kids want to play football, soccer, and run track, while Sandy wanted them to know how to play the piano and participate in church with the other kids.

She had become the shuttle driver, in addition to the corporate executive, the good wife, the perfect mother and the house manager. She made sure their clothes were washed, their favorite snacks were in the cabinet and their homework somehow managed to get completed before bed.

Her marriage, however, was on auto-pilot.
As Stacy’s children grew older and became increasingly independent, Sandy now had the time to focus more on her career. She began to excel at work, receiving promotions and discovering a new joy for her work that she hadn’t really been able to appreciate previously. With that success came longer hours at the office and more confidence in herself. With that increased level of confidence came a new sense of self. With that new sense of self came the desire for true happiness and more pleasure in her life. Something was shifting in her, but David didn’t notice.

David was fine with *fine*. He was fine with a marriage that wasn’t overflowing with passion because they had a family together.

He was fine with working hard and staying late at the office because taking care of the family financially was his way of showing love.

David was fine with not talking as much and having sex less and less because he didn’t want to argue with his wife.

He loved his wife. He loved his family. He liked his job and he didn’t really carry any desires for more. He was fine with *fine*.

**From Busy-ness to Emptiness to Loneliness**

Sandy would run all day long and essentially collapse at night into bed. She would often awake in the middle of the night with a sense of longing about what was missing in her marriage and in her life. She found herself sometimes even thinking about other men, but quickly pushed those thoughts from her mind. She would watch her husband in the middle of the night on the opposite side of the bed, not knowing how alone Sandy felt and sleeping like a baby.
Sandy began asking David to be more affectionate and he would make an effort for a few weeks, but then always go back to his way of loving from afar. She began sharing her feelings of emptiness with her husband, but not really addressing it directly. She would make suggestions that they take a vacation, but he was too busy at work. She suggested downsizing so that she could start her own business with something she was really passionate about, but he liked where they lived and all the kids’ friends were in this neighborhood. She tried to connect with David physically, but it always left her unfulfilled.

From a lack of consistent sleep, Sandy began not taking care of herself as she normally did and she got a bad sinus infection. That sickness left her tossing and turning, so David opted to sleep in the spare bedroom. The sinus infection hung on for almost 3 weeks, but the sleeping arrangements hung on for more than 3 years. Sandy used the need for a restful night’s sleep as the excuse for why sleeping in separate bedroom simply made sense.

Now with her children almost all graduated, she vaguely recalls the conversations about how good life would be once she and David were empty-nesters. She can’t recall the specific plans they had made and now, when she looks at her husband, she sees a kind and gentle stranger, with whom she has little in common. He’s a good person, but she’s no longer attracted to him. She has love for him, but she’s no longer in love with him. And the question that keeps her feeling stuck and isolated is, “Should I stay or should I go?”

“…Now, when she looks at her husband, she sees a kind and gentle stranger…”
Slowly, Over Time

I remember being on vacation at a lake one time with my first husband and I rented a floating lounger so that I could get some sun, but still feel the coolness from the lake on my skin. It was a hot day and we were with a group of friends in a boat. When they stopped the boat to swim, I slowly eased myself in the water and as gracefully as I could hoisted myself up onto this long lounger. I laid my head back and soaked up the sun.

My friends call me the lizard because I like really warm weather and can stay out in it far longer than I should. I’m not sure how long I was out there on the lake, maybe 30-45 minutes, likely falling in and out of a light sleep. I was startled awake when I heard my name being yelled from what sounded like pretty far away. I looked up and saw that I had floated almost all the way to shore, allowing the water to take me with no resistance. The boat looked like it was a mile away.

I think it’s the same with our relationships sometimes.

We don’t fall asleep one night in wedded bliss and then wake up the next day with an emptiness and loneliness that we can’t explain. Feeling alone happens slowly over time.
Chapter Two: The Challenges of Staying for the Children

“Nothing has a stronger influence psychologically on their environment and especially on their children than the unlived life of a parent.” C. G. Jung

Joanne called me in tears; her pain was palpable. She’s been in an unhappy marriage for twelve years. There was love there at one time, but that was so long ago, she couldn’t remember what that feeling of love felt like. There was no intimacy; there was no affection and she was slowly, but surely, losing her joy. Their relationship now felt more like roommates on the good days and adversaries on the worse days.

She didn’t know how to stay in that relationship and she didn’t know how to go either. She had convinced herself that she could stay until the kids graduated high school so they weren’t impacted by a separation and divorce. But as things continue to worsen, that promise gets harder and harder to keep.

She cannot keep living, simply existing, like this any longer. She cannot live in what feels like a cage, ignoring her own wings. Joanne has put her life, her love, her joy on hold in the hopes that doing so might somehow benefit her children. But now, she’s not so sure.
What We’re Teaching Our Children about Love

We all come by our beliefs and expectations about love and relationships pretty honestly; we learn the most through the example set by our parents and within our families as we grow up.

Joanne grew up with parents that were disconnected from each other for decades. They never spoke to one another lovingly in front of the kids and seemed to carry on their own separate and unhappy lives under the same roof and within the same four walls. So, it’s easy to see how that was the kind of marriage that Joanne walked into; it was the lens through which she saw relationships… until she started to feel the uneasiness of it within her life.

Through our living example, we teach our children how to be in relationship with another soul. We also teach them what we should expect or settle for in relationships. We teach them who and how to love.

Little girls that grow up seeing Daddy being emotionally abusive to Mommy will, unfortunately, likely expect the same from the young men in her life.

Young boys who see Mom yelling at Dad and trying to control him will find himself accepting controlling, bossy behavior from a woman who doesn’t respect him.

We demonstrate to our children what ingredients go into a relationship and what normal looks like. The relationships our children enter into will likely look a lot like what they saw at home.

Apply for a Complimentary Truth & Clarity Session
So, this begs the questions:

*What are our children learning about who and how to love from what they’re seeing and experiencing at home?*

*And is this the kind of relationship you’d like to see them in one day?*

There may not be anyone on the planet that you love more than your children, so of course, you wouldn’t want them to feel and experience pain and loneliness the way that you are likely are today. And yet, you’re willing to accept that for yourself.

This isn’t an area where, *Do as I say, not as I do* works very well.

This is why it’s so important to do everything you can to make the marriage either feel good again or be able to lovingly walk away from it.

**Our Children Deserve Happy Parents**

We want to give our children everything we possibly can. We save for their education. We buy them the latest iPhones and the coolest shoes. But what our children want and deserve, more than anything, is to have happy parents and live in a happy home.

Recently, a client’s 10-year old son told her, “If you and Daddy leave each other, that’s okay because I just want my mommy to be happy.”

And he deserves that, *doesn’t he?*  
We all do.
If you’re tormented by the pressure of making the right decision for you, your marriage and your family...

And you’re worried that if you make the incredibly difficult decision to leave your marriage that you’ll damage your children forever...

...be gentle with yourself.

You’re doing your best to teach them how to love and who to love.

And maybe right now, you have the opportunity to demonstrate something different for them. Maybe you can demonstrate what a healthy, loving relationship should look like...

...Either by fixing your marriage and making it feel good again...

...Or lovingly releasing both of you to create a healthy relationship in the future.

And maybe – just maybe - you’re giving your children the greatest lessons about love that they’ll ever receive.

What are your kids learning about who to love and how to love?
Chapter Three: What Keeps Us Stuck?

“Any action is often better than no action, especially if you have been stuck in an unhappy situation for a long time. If it is a mistake, at least you learn something, in which case, it’s no longer a mistake. If you remain stuck, you learn nothing.”

Eckhart Tolle

As a Love Coach, I speak to women every day in crisis in their marriages and the word they use to describe their feelings more than any other word is stuck.

They are simultaneously both desperate to do something to escape the loneliness and scared to death about what lies before them if they do. They don’t know how to be in their existing relationship and they don’t know how to leave it either.

Most of what keeps us stuck are the fearful thoughts running through our minds. To attempt to make sense of what is likely 60,000+ thoughts each day, we begin talking to others...and all that talking is many times, the very thing that keeps us stuck.
Other People Don’t Belong in Your Marriage

My client, Victoria, was struggling in her marriage. She and her husband were arguing more frequently, the words becoming increasingly hurtful towards one another and she was feeling like although she loved him as the father of their children together, she didn’t like him very much lately.

She and her daughter from her first marriage many years ago went to dinner together and Victoria shared all of this (and more) with her daughter. And of course, her daughter had an opinion to share and now felt very differently about her step-father than she did before she walked into that restaurant just a few hours ago.

In our session together, I told Victoria to begin becoming very intentional about who she shares the details of her marriage with, because when you share those private details of your marriage:

• You’re rolling out the red carpet for that person to have an opinion about your life...
• They’re only going to be able to tell you their story...what they would do based upon their own life experience..., but most importantly...
• You’re bringing someone into the relationship where they don’t belong and in the process you’re disrespecting the relationship itself.

Your relationship with your partner has only two pieces: You and your partner. That’s it. And the issues that arise are between the two of you, not anyone else. Within your relationship, a lot of private things get shared...hopes and dreams, fears and insecurities, desires and needs, hurts and heartaches.
I know when you share with others, you’re not *trying* to disrespect your relationship...
• You’re trying to get an opinion from someone who’s not emotionally wrapped-up in the problem.
• You’re trying to see if how you’re feeling about this problem is rational.
• You’re sometimes, just trying to make sure you’re not going crazy.

**Well-Intentioned Support**

I used to run a private Facebook group for women struggling in their marriages. When I started the group, my intention was to provide a space for women to become equipped to either fix their marriages or know how to walk away in a loving and peaceful manner. I wanted them to know that they weren’t alone and draw strength from other examples within the group.

Instead, what it became was a space for women to complain about their husbands and their situation, to tell and re-tell their painful stories over and over again. Which simply served to keep them stuck.

They were asking other women – who they did not know, who had no training and who were clearly struggling in their own relationships – what to do. Which also, as you can imagine, did not help them move forward.

I ended the group because I know all too well how a well-intentioned effort can be the very thing that keeps us stuck...
...stuck in our pain...
...stuck in our stories...
...and stuck in how we’ve always done things.
So Then What Should You Do?

If there’s a recurring problem in your marriage that you and your partner haven’t been able to resolve on your own, then seek professional help from someone who can genuinely be helpful (I’m right here...).

If you don’t know the answer to a recurring question, don’t take a poll of the peanut gallery about your life and your marriage. Instead, get quiet and still and listen for that inner guidance that’s been talking to you, while you’ve been talking to others.

No Decision is a Decision

When we’re facing a life-altering decision, it’s easy to see how we can become stuck, trapped and frozen in our steps. But understand that not making a decision, or deciding to remain in the status quo is, in fact, making a decision.

It’s making the decision to stay stuck.

I live in Columbus, Ohio. I could hop in my car tonight and drive to Dallas, TX and most of that trip would be made in the dark. With the headlights in my car, I can probably see 10 feet in front of me at a time. But I can drive through the night and make it to Dallas, TX tomorrow only being able to see 10 feet in front of me at any given time.
I know you think that you have to be able to see Dallas before you’ll even get in your car to go to the end of your block, but that’s not possible. And if you wait until you can see Dallas before you ever leave Columbus, you will never leave Columbus. You will stay stuck in Columbus forever.

You don’t have to know what the end looks like. Whether it’s staying in your marriage or lovingly releasing your marriage, there is no way to know exactly what life will look like one year from now. So, all you have to know is what’s the next step you need to take that will give you greater clarity to help you make your decision.

Scheduling time together will help you see if there’s a new version of your existing relationship that can emerge; maybe even one that you’ve never seen before (because the existing relationship clearly isn’t working).

Spending time apart can give you information about whether you miss your partner more than you thought you would or you finally feel free and at ease.

At this point, don’t allow the big question of, “Should I Stay or Should I Go?” to stop you from answering the smaller questions along this journey. Each step you take gives you more and more information and then no next step can ever be a mistake.

**Every step you take forward provides some valuable information.**

Apply for a Complimentary Truth & Clarity Session
Chapter Four:
The Power of Owning Our Role

“All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them.”
Galileo Galilei

When I had made the decision to end my first marriage, I had some soul searching to do. I began where it felt easy: by blaming him.

I created a story in my mind that he couldn’t love me the way I needed to be loved. I wanted something that he simply he couldn’t give. There is some truth there, but that’s not the full story.

I knew who he was when I met him. He was the one that was safe and secure. He was also reserved and structured.

I ignored the fact that there was very little spontaneity or passion, affection or connection in our relationship, so that I could hide my heart and never get hurt. I played it safe. I made that trade-off.
I was far from the perfect wife in that relationship, although I liked to attempt to make it appear that way while I was in it.

- I could have softened.
- I could have opened my heart to him, made myself vulnerable.
- I could have communicated what I needed better. I could have asked him what he needed.
- I could have heard what wasn’t being said.
- I could have been more receptive, more open, more accepting, more loving towards him.

When I was able to admit that to myself and own my role in the creation of my experience in that relationship was when everything shifted for me. Once I was willing to see it clearly and tell the truth about it, it gave me the opportunity to change it. I could make the decision to do it differently in the future. And that gave me back my power in my own life.

We cannot heal what we’re not willing to look at.

And what we don’t heal we carry as baggage into our next relationship, creating the same painful experience for ourselves again and again and again.

Creating a Future that is Different Than Your Past

If your marriage is going to heal and feel good again, it needs to evolve into an entirely new relationship. You can’t go back to who you were years ago when things may have been simpler because you’re not the same people. And what you’re doing now clearly isn’t working.

Apply for a Complimentary Truth & Clarity Session
So, if it’s going to work moving forward, it needs to evolve into something new.

In order to do that, you will need to be able to see your role in the creation of your experience – how you got here – and make the conscious decision to do it differently going forward.

Here’s the good news...as soon as you change, the relationship changes. You will gather more information that will bring you closer and closer to clarity about the next right step for yourself and your marriage.

As soon as you change, the relationship changes.

And even if you change, you own your part and you do it differently, and the marriage cannot be fixed, at least you can move forward knowing you did everything possible. And that’s what allows you to move forward without second-guessing, self-judgment or regret.

Plus, you won’t carry the emotional hurt or baggage from this relationship forward into a subsequent relationship, unintentionally sabotaging it or repeating the same painful story for yourself.

Did You Know?*

40%-50% of first marriages end in divorce
67% of second marriages end in divorce
74% of third marriages end in divorce

That’s not a coincidence.
That’s because most people think the problem is the other person and never go to look back at their own role so that they can do it differently in the future. They haven’t yet taken personal responsibility for themselves, their lives and their relationships.

But, here’s the thing: **It’s not your fault.**

- No one ever taught us how to be in relationship with one another and how to handle it when things start getting bad.

- No one ever taught us how to express what we need and how to set healthy boundaries.

- No one has ever taught us how to communicate, how to listen, and how to identify what’s *really* going on between the two of you.

Relationships are the hardest thing on the planet to do and to do well. But there’s nothing more important on the planet than our relationships.

So, it’s worth learning...

And once you learn how to do this differently, you can create the kind of loving relationship you desire (whether that’s with your husband or someone else in the future).

Chapter Five:
Can I Fix My Marriage By Myself?

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used to create them.”
Albert Einstein

I received an application recently that said, “We have so many problems and we’ve been disconnected for so long that I don’t know if it will do any good if he’s not also working on fixing the problems in our marriage. Is it even possible for me to fix my marriage by myself?”

We have been taught to believe that in order to fix a relationship, both parties need to be present and actively working on the issues within the relationship. But I would argue that’s not actually true...

Just like one person can destroy a relationship, it only takes one person to fix a relationship as well.
Our relationships are a dance with one another. So, when the two of you have been dancing the tango for years and you, all of a sudden begin doing the salsa, your partner’s going to have to take some new steps in order to stay in step with you.

Likewise, when you adjust your approach to communicating, that will impact the response you receive from your husband.

When you no longer react as you have previously or defend against his accusation, his armor lowers and space is made for possibilities that did not exist previously.

When you change the rules about how you treat both him and yourself, there is always a reaction that looks and feels different than previous ways you engaged with one another.

You actually have the ability to focus on and bring out the best parts of your husband, just as much as you know what buttons to press to expose the worst parts of him. It’s just that there are some tools you haven’t yet learned to use and you have some old habits and patterns that need to be interrupted.

That’s why you doing the deep work of healing the hurts and improving your relationship can make all the difference in your marriage, even if your husband isn’t hiring a coach or seeing a therapist or even reading a book on relationships.
I get that it makes logical sense that you both have things to work on and improve and heal, so therefore you both should make an effort.

But here’s what usually happens:

The two people in the relationship aren’t ready to do that level of work at the same time and because one won’t work on it until the other is ready...

Nothing gets done...
No one moves forward...
The same old patterns keep repeating inside the relationship...

And the marriage continues to become more and more disconnected.

But you can absolutely take a step forward to give yourself the possibility of happiness by learning new relationship tools and putting them into practice in your life and your marriage.

You marriage may heal; or it may not. But, either way, YOU will heal, you will be at peace with your decision, and you will get back into the driver’s seat of your own life.

Either way, YOU will heal…

Apply for a Complimentary Truth & Clarity Session
Ready to Get Answers for Your Relationship & Learn the One Truth that will Change Everything?

Apply for a complimentary Truth & Clarity session to see if there’s a fit for us to work together.
Who I Am.

Hello, my name is Sharon Pope.

I am a certified Master Life Coach and a six-time international best-selling author who helps women get the clarity they need to know whether it’s time to dig-in and recommit or to lovingly leave their relationship. I help them discover their answers for their marriages, their hearts and their lives.


I live in Columbus, Ohio with the love of my life: my husband, Derrick.

Tell the Truth. Show up in Love. Live in Freedom.

SHARON POPE
MASTER LIFE COACH & BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
www.SharonPopeTruth.com