



# Stay or Go?

How to Find Confidence and Clarity So  
You Can Fix Your Marriage, or Move  
Forward Without Regret

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“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”

Anais Nin

# Chapter One:

## 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*.

I am now happier than I even knew was possible. I am remarried to an incredible man, feeling the kind of connected, intimate and soulful love I always longed for. But more importantly, I no longer look to my partner to make me happy and I have learned how to love unconditionally.



**Notice a Difference?**

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.

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.

# Chapter Two: 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.

Sandy feels increasingly alone as the distance between she and David grows wider and deeper. He wants more physical affection, but is unable – or unwilling - 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**

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 the kids 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 entrepreneur, 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.

## Fine with Fine.

As Sandy's children grew older and became increasingly independent, Sandy now had the time to focus more on herself and her business. She began to thrive in her work which gave her some newfound confidence and a new sense of self. With that success and confidence came the desire for more pleasure in her life.

Something was shifting in Sandy, 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 or connecting with Sandy as often because many times it turned into a disagreement and he'd rather just keep the peace.

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

But Sandy wasn't fine with fine.

She had dreams and desires for her life that included a loving and connected relationship. She wanted someone she could travel with, she wanted a partner she could truly share her life and her interests with, she wanted to feel passion again.

## 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 as he slept in the middle of the night on the opposite side of the bed, not knowing how alone Sandy felt even though he was only inches away.

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. Now when she looks at her husband, she sees a kind and gentle stranger, with whom she has little in common.

“...Now, when she looks at her husband, she sees a kind and gentle stranger...”

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?*”

There are so many couples in this same situation: couples that have poured themselves and their love into their children and placed their marriages on auto-pilot for years or even decades. But like anything that gets ignored – the marriage deteriorates over time.

The disconnection between the couple becomes increasingly apparent as the kids become older and there's more room that could be filled with connecting as a couple, but for many reasons, is not.

As a matter of fact, the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University has reported that divorce rates for couples over 50 years old have more than doubled in recent years.

And two-thirds of the time it is the woman that is asking for the divorce.

It is the woman that feels the longing for more in her marriage.

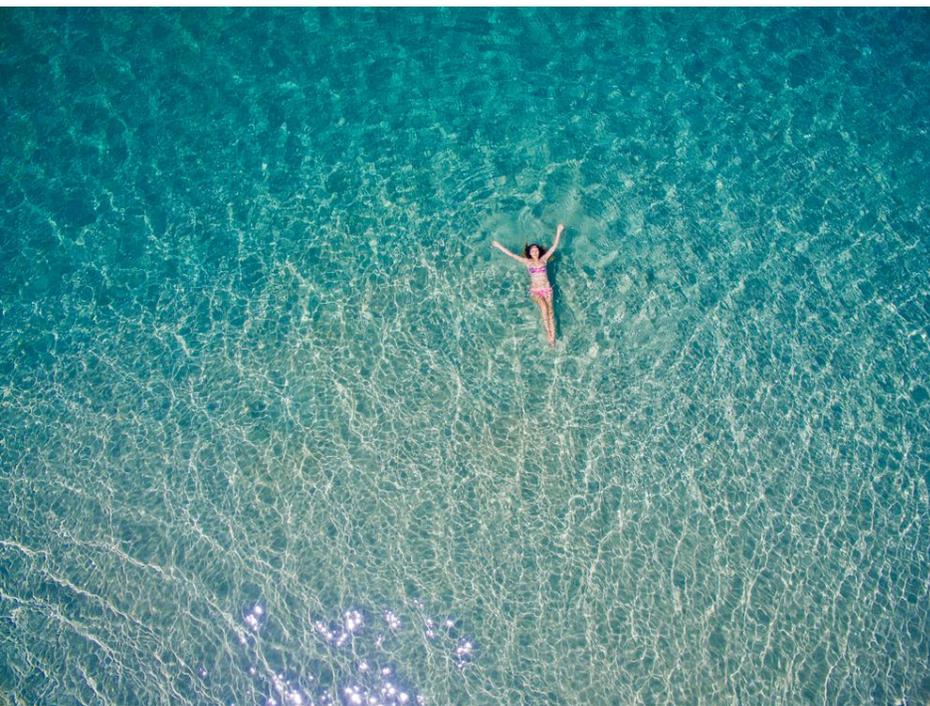
It is the woman that is no longer fine with fine.



## Slowly, Over Time

I remember being on vacation at a lake one time with my first husband and I rented a floating lounge 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 lounge. 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. *Felling alone happens slowly over time.*



We get distracted by life. We put our marriages on auto-pilot and pour everything we have into our kids and our careers. We drift apart slowly, gently and sometimes without resistance. It was never deliberate or intentional. No one gets married so that they can find themselves feeling alone and disconnected. But when we're startled awake, we suddenly realize how far away we really are from where we once were.

# 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:

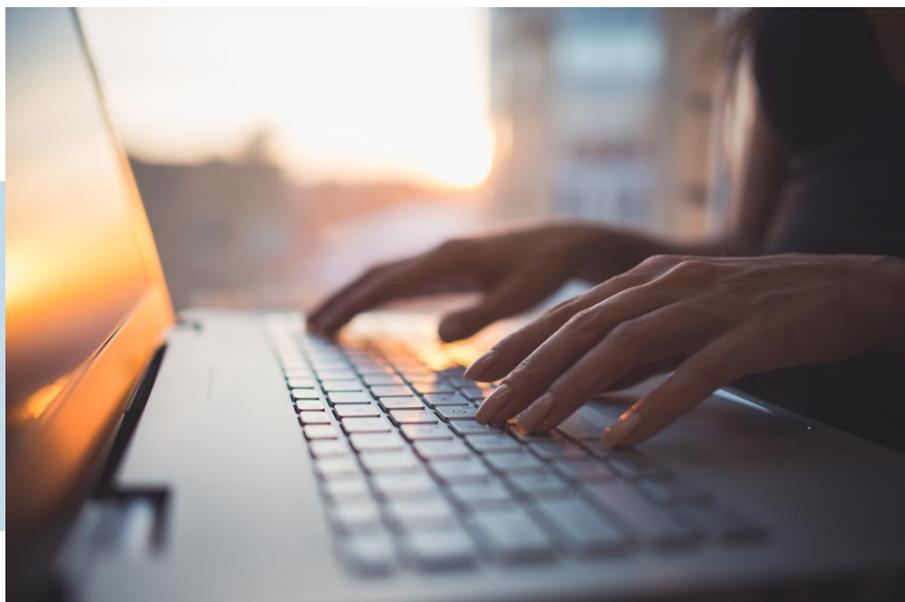
- You're rolling out the red carpet for that person to have an opinion about your life...
- They're only going to be able to tell you their story...what they would do based upon their own life experience..., but most importantly...
- You're bringing someone into the relationship where they don't belong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

All your family and friends can tell you in their story, their fears, what they would do;  
this is yours to do.

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, to draw strength from other examples within the group and to challenge their thinking as it related to their current struggles, how they got to this place and how to come through it.

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 only served to keep them stuck:

...stuck in the pain...

...stuck in their stories...

...and stuck in how they've always done things.

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, as you can imagine, did not help them move forward or gain any clarity.

Likewise, your family and friends love you and they want to support you. Let them do that.

They also can only tell you their stories, their fears, what they would do if they were in your situation. But they're not. You are and this is yours to do.



## Who Can Support Me?

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. More voices are not better; instead, they're providing noise that makes you believe you cannot trust your own judgement, your own inner wisdom about what's best for you.



## 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 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, which means it's not a mistake.

# Chapter Four:

## Are You Ready to Own What's Yours?

*"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 clearly how I was showing up in the relationship and contributing to the problems, it gave me the opportunity to change it. I could make the decision to do it differently in the future.

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

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

And what we don't heal we carry as baggage into future relationships:

- Either into the 2.0 version of your marriage, sabotaging it before it can take hold, or
- Making future love interests pay for or overcompensate for wounds you haven't healed yourself.

## Why Do So Many Second and Third Marriages End in Divorce?\*

Research estimates that somewhere between 40%-50% of first marriages end in divorce. But the more staggering numbers are for subsequent marriages:

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 within the relationship 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 and their role in the creation of their own experience so they end up unintentionally re-creating similar dysfunction within the next relationship.



\* Source: <https://www.mckinleyirvin.com/Family-Law-Blog/2012/October/32-Shocking-Divorce-Statistics.aspx>



## **I'm Not the Problem. He Is.**

*I have tried talking to him, ignored the situation, threatened to leave, but nothing changes. I've tried to get him to go to counseling, but he won't go. I have told him what I need until I am blue in the face, but he won't do it. Nothing's ever going to change.*

This is paraphrased from one conversation this week, but honestly, I've had this same general conversation a handful of times throughout the last two weeks with different women in different parts of the country from all walks of life. The underlying and unspoken words are:

*I've done everything I'm supposed to do; I'm not the problem....he is and could you please fix my husband for me, Sharon?*

If I had the fix-your-husband-for-you pill, I would have more money than Oprah and Steve Jobs combined.

But even if I had it, I'm not sure I would use it.

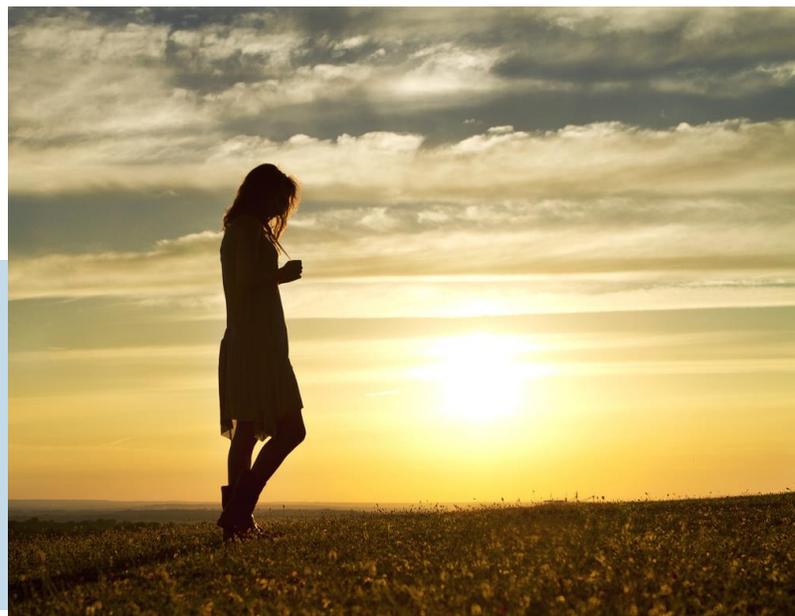
**Because it's not the answer.**

If I could get your husband to stand on his head and do all the things you want him to do so that you could feel safe...loved...wanted...then he becomes your puppet, rather than an individual with his own choices and preferences and needs. *Is that really what you want?*

Not only is it not the answer, it's also not the truth.

Your husband probably could do better at being in relationship with you – after all, no one has ever taught him how to create and sustain healthy, loving, connected relationships either.

But you can also do better.



As this well-intentioned woman was telling me HOW she had been communicating with her husband, I could almost see her shaking her head, rolling her eyes, pointing a wagging finger at her husband telling him what he should do. If that worked...not only would our husbands do as they're told, but so would our kids....our dogs...our parents...



She doesn't want to change. She wants him to change.  
She's not the problem. He is.

And therein lies the rub...and a lot of unnecessary suffering.

Here's the teachable part:

Every single one of us can do better so that our relationships can be better.

Every single one of us has room to grow and baggage that needs healed.

Every single one of us could engage or communicate in a new way in order to elicit a response that's more in line with the result we're wanting to create.

Changing ourselves is hard enough to do. And changing ourselves is the only thing we have any control over. Someone has to take the lead in creating change in the relationship, why can't it be you?



## Someone Has to Take the Lead

In order to change past painful patterns, someone has to be the first to take the lead and interrupt those patterns. Someone has to be willing to do it differently in order to create change within the relationship.

In the words of Albert Einstein: *Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.*

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again  
and expecting a different result.”  
Albert Einstein

You take the lead.

I know, I know.....I hear you saying, “Why should I do all the work? That’s not fair.”

I get it. But without someone stepping forward and taking the lead, both of you will wander aimlessly with no clear direction and likely remaining in this same painful place for more months or years.

I know, I know.....I hear you saying, “I can’t do it alone.”

We’ve been taught that you both have to work on it together simultaneously, but that’s not actually true.

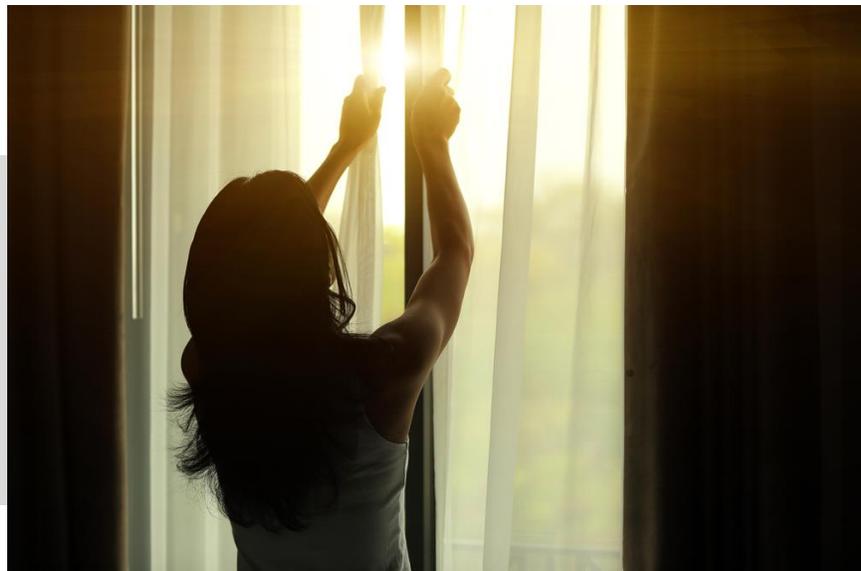
Our relationships are a dance with one another. So, when the two of you have been dancing the tango for years and you, all of a sudden begin doing the salsa, your partner’s going to have to take some new steps in order to stay in step with you.

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

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.



It just takes one of you to take the lead and be willing to change the way you engage. Because when you do, your partner's reaction to you will also change.

And that....changes everything.

# Chapter Four: Where To Begin?

*“You cannot always control what goes on outside, but you can always control what goes on inside.”*

Wayne Dyer

When it comes to gaining real clarity regarding such a difficult decision, we need to begin where everything begins: in the mind.

We all have an older, more primitive part of our brains – scientists call it the reptilian brain. Even though it is the oldest part of our brain, it is not the most evolved part. In this part of the brain is where our fight-or-flight instinct lives.

This part of the brain only has one job: to keep you safe.

It does not care that you're unhappy.

It has no interest in you growing or trying a new way of engaging with your spouse; *what if it doesn't work? What if you fail? What if you feel rejected?*



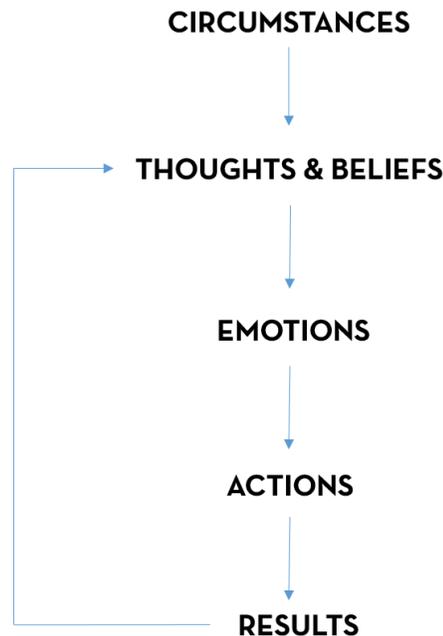
And it most certainly doesn't want you to begin thinking about leaving the marriage! That makes that part of the brain completely freak out and send you fearful messages all day long:

- *What if you hurt your kids?*
- *What if you hurt him?*
- *What will the family say?*
- *What if you regret your decision?*
- *What if you're alone forever?*

All those fearful messages and what-if scenarios create a very cluttered and noisy mind – which is one of the primary reasons why you haven't been able to come to a clear answer that you can trust for yourself.

## The Game Changer

One of my teachers, Brooke Castillo created a tool called The Model, which I think does a beautiful job of articulating the inner workings of how these issues have been created and sustained – so that we can then do it differently in the future.



Brooke Castillo, The Self-Coaching Model

Circumstances are neither positive nor negative. They're neutral. They're facts. They can be proven in a court of law. Here are some examples:

*The wall is yellow.*

*I've been married 20 years.*

*My husband had an affair.*

Those circumstances don't become positive or negative until we have a thought about that circumstance:

*Yellow is a horrible color for a wall.*

*20 years is really a great accomplishment.*

*My husband shouldn't have had an affair.*

These are thoughts. They are opinions. They are not facts.

Most of us believe our thoughts as though they are facts, when they're not. Even something as universally believed as, my husband shouldn't have had an affair, is still just a thought that we have created in our minds after years of conditioning and beliefs about what is "right" and what is "wrong."



Being able to distinguish the differences between a circumstance and a thought is a powerful foundation upon which you can begin creating relationships that look and feel dramatically different than those you're experiencing today.

Let's keep going...

Emotions are created by our thoughts. Most people don't like to talk about emotions – preferring instead to pretend they're not there – but here's the problem with that plan:

Our emotions are what is driving ALL of our actions, choices and behaviors. We like to think we're rational...making decisions based on pros and cons, but we don't. We take action based upon how we feel, so it's important to know how we feel – and what thoughts we're thinking that are creating that emotion. Therefore, if we want to feel better, we have to change the thoughts that are causing the emotion.

You have 100% control over the thoughts you choose to think.

The great news: You have 100% control over what thoughts you choose to think.

No one can make you think anything.

But it's time we started consciously choosing what it is we want to think so that we can take different actions and ultimately create the results we truly want in our lives.

Our actions, choices and behaviors are what will create the results we experience.

Let's bring this to life for you:

Circumstance: The conversations between my husband and I are primarily about work and the kids.

Thought: My husband and I are disconnected.

Emotion: sadness, despair, worry, doubt, defeat

Action: Just keep going through the motions, hoping things will get better. I don't discuss how I'm feeling because I don't want to start an argument or hurt him.

Result: The distance between us as a couple becomes increases and I begin to resent how nothing is changing. I begin to think about leaving the marriage because I don't know what else to do.



When most people want to change the result, they start attempting to control the actions – telling their husbands what they need, but he doesn't seem to understand how to meet those needs (because if he did, he would have probably done it by now). And because the thought, *My husband and I are disconnected* is there, she's skeptical that anything will change and therefore, isn't open or able to see what he is trying to do to make it better.



To change the outcome, we have to change our thoughts. We have to think on purpose. We have to want to feel as good as we can feel and reach for a *truthful* thought that gets us closer to the outcome we truly desire. If you begin to manage your mind in this way it is a complete game changer for virtually every relationship you have – but especially the one that's struggling the most right now.

## What This Doesn't Mean...

It doesn't mean overlooking bad behavior.

It doesn't mean talking yourself into being fine with fine.

It doesn't mean dropping your needs, desires and preferences.

What it does mean is taking responsibility for our thoughts and how those thoughts are actually creating our experience.

You likely would agree with me that we are responsible for what we do, but we are also responsible for the thoughts we think. The thoughts you create, drive all of our emotions and therefore our actions. And of course, our actions will create the results in our lives.

It's good news and bad news, really: We have 100% control over what we think and what we think is what's creating our experience.

I wish someone had told me this 20 years ago...

I wish there were more of us who knew this...

I could have saved myself so much heartache and pain.

It's good news and bad news, really:  
We have 100% control over what we think and what  
we think is what's creating our experience.

# Chapter Five:

## Can a Troubled Marriage be Fixed?

*“Hope never abandons you, you abandon it.”*

George Weinberg

You now know that one of the biggest fears that keeps women stuck in indecision is a fear of regret.

- They fear making the wrong decision and leaving too quickly.
- They fear staying and wasting another five or ten years of their lives.
- They fear years of second-guessing their decision

One of the best ways to know for sure if the right answer for your life is to lovingly release the marriage is when you know you made every effort possible and it still didn't work.

When you can truly know that you put forth your best effort and showed up as the woman you want to be inside that relationship – and it still didn't work for both of you – that's when you can create an answer that you can trust, believe in and take action upon.

Natalie's marriage is on the ropes. She and her husband, Chad, are living apart, they've filed the paperwork, and the divorce process is underway. But she's still not sure if she can walk away from more than two decades with the man she pledged to love forever.



They haven't had an emotional connection for a long time, and she never felt heard or beautiful or desired by him in the relationship, but there's still a voice inside her that that whispers, "Is there some way to save this?"

There are a lot of things about Natalie's marriage that don't work, clearly, since they've gotten this far into the process:

- She wants an intimate, emotionally connected, and passionate love.
- She wants to feel special, heard, and desired in her relationship.
- She wants to feel alive again.

There are also a lot of ways that their relationship does work (otherwise this wouldn't have lasted as long as it did):

- Natalie and Chad always had a lot of fun together and even after all these years, he can still make her laugh.
- He's an amazing father and they do a great job of parenting the children together.
- When she envisioned growing old with someone, it was always with him.

But, here's the thing:

There are also some things that *aren't* working in the relationship that *are* working for Natalie (stay with me here...).

Natalie says that she and Chad are disconnected, but it feels safe and comfortable to stay tucked into a story so that she doesn't have to open herself up and be vulnerable with her husband. She doesn't have to risk being rejected or disappointed further; when nothing is risked, nothing is lost.

Staying in that story is actually working for Natalie.



Natalie had planned a romantic long weekend away for the two of them a few months ago and Chad declined, saying he had to work over the weekend. That left Natalie feeling rejected and undesirable.

That perceived rejection created resentment and a wider gap of disconnection. It's far easier to stay in that rejection-and-disconnection story than to face potential rejection again and attempt to re-connect with her distant husband.



There are pieces of most relationships that work and other pieces that don't.

But there are also pieces that don't really work, but are somehow serving you.

And *those* are the pieces that are important to see through a new lens and really inspect to see how the painful story you're carrying is actually the very thing that is keeping you stuck.

## **You Can't Find the Solution with the Same Thinking that Created the Problem**

When we're struggling in our marriages, we're always looking for a way to improve it, to make it feel better.

But all too often, what ends up happening is using the same thinking and ways to engage with one another because it's all we know. For instance:

Something happens between you and you argue trying to get your partner to see it from your perspective...

You both give each other the silent treatment for a day or two...

Eventually, the frustration subsides and you begin communicating and interacting again as you usually do...

You don't revisit the hurt because you don't want to start another fight, but nothing ever really gets resolved.

And the relationship stays in the same painful pattern...

When we use the same thinking and the same tools to engage with one another, the same painful patterns continue.

Or worse, the resentments increase over time as the hope you once had that things might change begins to dissolve.

You're simply doing what you know how to do. This is the only way you know how to communicate or engage with your partner.

But that way of thinking is what got you to this point.

And you can't find the solution to the problem with the same thinking that got you here.

So it's time to try something new...



It's time to interrupt the pattern...

It's time to elevate the conversation between the two of you...

It's time to alter your reactions...

It's time to change the rules and set emotionally healthy boundaries.

It's time to hear one another..... *really* hear one another...

It's time to understand how our emotions have played a role...

It's time to identify the changes you can make within yourself...

It's time to see if your partner is sincere about change...  
It's time to get the clarity you need to know whether this relationship can feel good again or if it's time to lovingly release it.

And it is time to shift your thinking...your way of being...and the way you engage in order to see if something new can be created – because what you've been doing is what got you here.



## **Marriage 2.0**

In order to fix a struggling marriage, you have to be willing to learn some new tools and do it differently. I call this creating the 2.0 version of your marriage.

You can't go backwards to re-create who you were as a couple so many years ago – maybe before kids or before life threw you some curveballs; you're not the same woman you were back then (and neither is your husband the same man).

And the relationship you have now clearly is not working.

So if you're going to give this marriage the best opportunity of working, you need to create a new version of it – one that looks and feels completely different - and one that feels good for both of you.

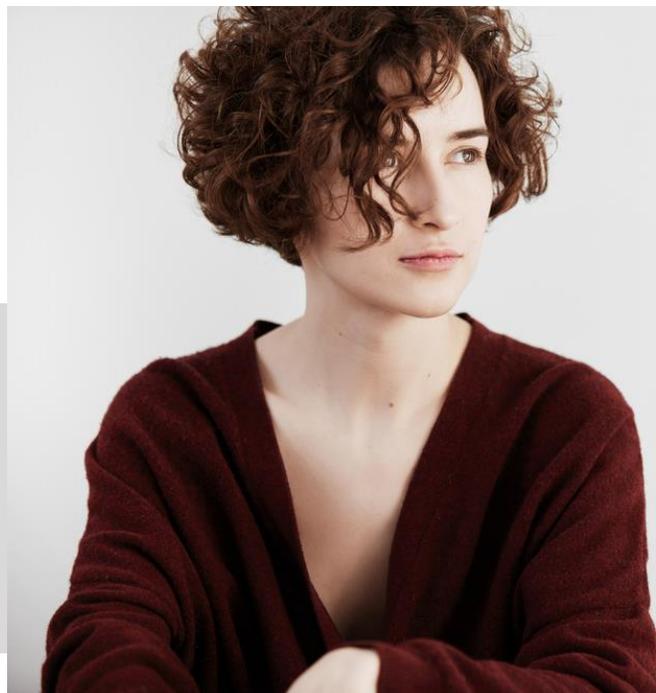
There is an old, outdated way of being in relationship with one another that no longer is working for today's couples:

**Not being able to express what we need.** If we cannot articulate what we need, how can we ever expect that our needs will be met? This sets our partners up for failure because they're left to either guess at what we need or give us what *they* would need – which is rarely the same thing.

**Keeping score so the relationship feels equal.** Keeping a scorecard on one another doesn't foster a healthy, loving relationship. Besides, what's the point of keeping score?

- The first person to 500 loses? Loses what?..... Their marriage?
- Or the first to track their partners' flaws to 500 wins? Wins what?..... Wins a lifetime of unhappiness and discontent?

There is no winner in the game of keeping a scorecard.



**Avoiding difficult topics in order to keep the peace.** In every relationship there are things that need to be discussed. When those things go unaddressed, they don't magically get better. It's been my experience that the situation worsens as the resentments build from unresolved issues and challenges that go unspoken.

**Trying to control our partner's actions.** Most of the world walks around attempting to control the uncontrollable. They want to change the circumstances or the actions of other people. And because they are never successful in doing so, they cause themselves a tremendous amount of unnecessary suffering in the process.





**Arguing to prove your point or to be right.** Every single person on the planet wants to be heard and understood; that's a basic human need. We've all heard the saying, *You can be right or you can be happy.* The reason we've all heard it is because there is some hard truth embedded within that phrase. We want to be heard. We want to be understood. *And we want to be right.* But are we willing to forego being right for feeling good? As crazy as it sounds, most are not.

These five ways we engage in our most important, most intimate relationship are a recipe for disaster.

It's the trial and error approach.

We try to be in relationship with one another, but when we're not getting our needs met and challenges occur, we don't know how to fix it and unfortunately, we fall short more often than we'd like. This old way of being in relationship does not work anymore. Just like everything on our planet evolves, our relationships need to evolve as well.

Creating a 2.0 version of your marriage – one that looks and feels dramatically different than your current marriage will require doing it differently. Here's how:

**Telling our partners what we need.** Setting healthy boundaries includes telling people what we need (as well as what's not okay with us). Boundaries are essentially telling the truth of who we are and letting people know us – both deeply and interdependently.

We've not been taught to express what we need – sometimes even being called selfish for doing so. But it's so important to communicate that to our partners in a way they can receive it, so then when they genuinely want to meet our needs, they're equipped to do so.



**Dropping the Scorecard.** Marriage isn't always equal. There are times when one partner needs to carry more of the load and extend the other a bit of grace. And there will always be other times when the other partner does much of the heavy-lifting.

My client Cathy felt like she was doing everything in the relationship, until her brother went through a three year battle with cancer and her husband showed up for her – and her brother – in a big way, providing extra support during a difficult time.

A scorecard is not only unnecessary; it also serves as a point of separation rather than a way for improving connection and understanding.

A scorecard is not only unnecessary; it also serves as a point of separation in the relationship.

**Having the Difficult Conversations.** The most difficult conversations are also the ones that most need to be had. Those are the conversations that need to begin from a place of curiosity and openness.

My suggestion is that before you approach this conversation, you get clear about who you want to be and how you want to feel when it's over.

For instance, I recently headed into what I knew would be a difficult, but important conversation with people I care about deeply. I stopped and asked myself, “Who do I want to show up as in this moment?” and “When it’s over, how do I want to feel?”

I wanted to show-up as the loving woman that they could depend upon to see things clearly and with compassion.

I wanted also to be accepting of their decisions because they also get a choice in the creation of their own experiences – even when I think there’s a better or easier way.

When it was all said and done, I wanted to feel some degree of peace about the decision and clarity about our next steps.

And not surprisingly, that’s what I got. That small investment of time and focus up-front made all the difference in the outcome and the relationship. It is possible to have difficult conversations in a loving manner.



**Releasing the Need to Change or Control.** We all know intellectually that we cannot change or control our husbands but that doesn't mean we don't try. We talk to him endlessly, we nag, we argue, we beg, we shut down, we withhold love or sex – and still we feel like nothing changes.

I have a saying that *adults get to do whatever adults want to do*; it's one of the only benefits of being an adult compared to being a kid.

Therefore although we cannot make our spouses do anything they don't want to do, we can create an environment where they actually want to please us, want to be more connected to us.

If we can create fertile soil and then we plant seeds, water and tend to it often, that's how good things take root and grow.



**Choose to be Happy over Being Right.** Happiness is a moment-to-moment choice that we make. Our minds will defend our need to be right because it wants to protect us, but all that defending only serves to separate us.

I was speaking to a client the other day who I'll refer to as Jenny. I had been working with her for only one week and she had already begun to implement the tools I had taught her.

She was in the car with her husband for a road trip with their teenage kids. He had the music cranked up loud and was jamming; the kids were singing along. She looked around at what was happening and her mind immediately told her, "If you wanted to do that, he would never let you; he would complain the whole time."

She could have let her mind spin around in that thought for awhile, building resentment – but she would have missed out on enjoying a good time with her family. Instead, she made the decision to be happy in that moment and join the party. It was a great afternoon; one like they hadn't had in a long time.



## There's Always Hope

No matter how damaged a relationship is, there's always the opportunity to fix it.

No matter how much hurt has been caused between two people, there's always a path to healing.

No matter how disconnected you now feel, there's always hope to re-connect and engage in a new and different way if you're willing to do the work.

There are no guarantees, but there's always hope.



# Chapter Six: What if It Doesn't Work?

*"Some of us think holding on makes us strong; but sometimes it is letting go."*

Hermen Hesse

Yes, if you're arguing constantly with your spouse, clearly the marriage is breaking down and becoming increasingly uncomfortable. But at least when you're arguing with one another, you're still trying....you're still *in the ring*.

...You're mostly caught in the chain of pain trying to get the other person to change...but you're still trying to make it work, maybe in the only way you know how.

When we stop trying to make it work...

When we stop trying to get the other person to change...

When we stop trying to get them to understand our pain...or hear their point of view...

We become indifferent.  
We stop caring.  
We stop talking.  
We even stop fighting.  
We give up.

We just begin to do our own thing, not sharing information, coming home late, and confiding in others.

We get rebellious in what we will do to numb ourselves to the reality in our relationships.

We put up a protective wall around our hearts and shut down to minimize the future damage.

We've checked out and we begin to care less and less about what's happening in our homes and in our relationship.



And that's when we know the marriage may be too far gone to recover.

Because the opposite of love isn't hate, anger, rage or blame. It's actually *indifference*.

## Did You Know?

When I'm meeting with a new client for the first time, I always ask them about their relationship when they first met and when they got married. Although how they felt about their husband at that time is different than how they feel about him today, it's not uncommon for them to express to me that, on some level, they knew. Many women have shared with me that, even on the day they were walking down the aisle, they knew they might be making a mistake.

My client Gabriele shared with me that the week she returned from her honeymoon, she and her husband had a big discussion and made an agreement with each other that neither was ever going to spend more than \$500 without talking to the other one first.

The stakes in their lives aren't \$500 anymore; sometimes they're tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars, but the problem remains. And now when he makes large financial decisions without her is an enormous issue in their marriage.

She didn't realize that not everyone feels the need to sit down, have a conversation, and make an agreement like they did. She didn't realize that with many couples it's understood that you make big financial decisions together.

At some level, even the week after her honeymoon, she knew she needed to have that conversation with her husband.

She knew she needed to say out loud and have him agree that he wouldn't do the very thing she feared most that he would do.

Another client, Alison, told me the story about how she and her husband wrote letters to each other to read on the day of their wedding before walking down the aisle. She can't remember exactly what she wrote or what his letter specifically said to her, but she distinctly remembers thinking, back there in the little room in the back of the church, "He loves me more than I love him."

Even then, on their wedding day, at some level, she knew.

In my own first marriage, I was the one that pursued the relationship and the marriage. I was going to make it work because I knew he wouldn't ever hurt me, lie to me or cheat on me. If I was being really honest with myself at that time, I knew I wasn't madly in love; I only knew that I felt safe.



On some level, at some time, we likely knew something wasn't quite right, but we let our minds overrule what our hearts and instincts were speaking to us.

## Maybe the Relationship is Complete

I know...

I know.....

We are taught that the relationship with our spouse is supposed to last forever (specifically *until death do us part...*).

And I think most of us walk into marriage with the best of intentions, actually believing in the possibility of forever and some version of happily ever after.

And when forever becomes an impossibility in our marriages - unable to imagine one more month...one more year - we beat ourselves up pretty badly for not being able to make it work. We also beat up our partners pretty badly for them not being the partner we needed them to be for us.

But we stay together - making each other pretty miserable - because that's what we're SUPPOSED to do...



I know...

But what if what we're actually supposed to do is to be happy?

What if our short time alive in this body has a purpose and that purpose is to create, to grow, and to expand?

What if to love and to be loved is the whole damn point?

And what if your marriage isn't a failure or a mistake, but rather...complete?

Maybe it served its purpose in your life, in your growth and expansion...

Maybe it was exactly what you needed at one time, but now feels like a shirt that is two sizes too small...

Maybe the relationship was there to present you with the lesson you most needed to learn in this life...

And now it is complete.





## Now What?

When we come to the realization that our marriages are over, it can feel paralyzing. Give yourself some time to let that new truth sink in before taking any action. It's a powerful realization and it deserves some reverence.

It takes a lot of courage to admit to yourself that, at least from your perspective, the relationship is over.

It's not a decision we wake-up and make one day and then check that off on the to-do list.

It's like an undercurrent that's been running beneath your heart for years.

It is a realization of what is.

It's what is true for you.

There's actually some peace in that awareness.

## The Case for Peace

My client Deborah had grown tired of the constant criticism and ridicule she received every night when she walked through our front door. Her husband would start in on her: “Where have you been? Why is this house always a wreck? You’re such a mess.”

They couldn’t have a discussion or connect. There was no tenderness or intimacy. Only anger and venom.

That verbal abuse went on for years until Deborah had finally had enough.

It’s easier to walk away from a relationship in anger and hurt than in kindness, compassion and love. It’s infinitely easier when there’s something to be pissed off or angry about.



My client Susan was married to a decent man. She told me, “I wish he would cheat on me or shove me or something; that would make leaving so much easier. I keep trying to pick a fight, but it’s not working because he’s so damn agreeable. It’s not bad enough to leave but I don’t know how to stay.”

We think if only we had a big, socially acceptable reason for leaving, that would make it easier, when sometimes it’s the quiet whispers of our hearts that we can’t explain.

It’s easy to walk away in anger. It’s infinitely harder to walk away in love, but the pay-off is so worth it.

*It’s easy to walk away in anger. It’s infinitely harder to walk away in love. But it’s worth the effort.*

Most people sign themselves up for months, or even years, of anger and venom and hate as they move through the divorce process, blaming one another and dividing the assets.

That’s not how it has to be.

Your kids don’t have to have two separate graduation parties...  
They don’t have to worry about both of you being at the wedding...  
They don’t have to have separate birthday parties for your grandchild’s first birthday because you two can’t be in the same room together.

If you do this with emotional maturity, all of the future drama for decades and generations can be side-stepped.

This will require you to keep your own personal peace as a priority.

It will require you to silence the scarcity mindset that tells you if he gets more, you get less.

It will require you find compassion when he's on his own emotional roller-coaster.



## Your Next Steps

If you've decided that the marriage is over, it's time to start communicating your feelings with your husband. Ideally, this will not be a surprise to him because you've been communicating about your unhappiness inside the relationship for quite some time.

Understand that the more surprised your husband is at this news, the more time he will need to process what's happening. You've been thinking about this decision for a long time; he's going to need some time to catch-up and make a decision about how he's going to deal with your decision.

- He may dive-in and do what's possible to attempt to change your decision; essentially giving you some new information to work with. That needs to be backed-up by action and support.
- He may also choose to give up, not knowing how to deal with the hurt and the anger he's likely feeling.



Either way, by initiating this conversation and taking this next step, you will gain some valuable information.

Even when a marriage ends, there's still opportunity for some good in the goodbye if you take it slowly and consciously and if you are emotionally prepared to move through the next steps.

# Conclusion

*“In the end, we only regret the changes we didn’t take and the decisions we waited to make.”*

Anonymous

Outside of the decision to get married, determining whether or not to stay or go in your marriage is likely the biggest decision you will ever make with wide-sweeping impacts in your life.

I have seen marriages on the brink of ending reverse course and restore the deep connection they’re craving.

And I have seen women paralyzed by fear at the prospect of leaving, confidently and lovingly part ways and find true happiness.

Few things in life bring me more joy as a coach than seeing a client get to an answer for their heart and their life that they can feel peace about and act upon to move their life forward.



Get the Confidence and Clarity So That You Can Fix Your Marriage, Or Move Forward Without Regret.

Apply for a complimentary  
[Truth & Clarity session](#)

to see if there's a fit for us to work together to get your answers for your life.

# Who I Am.



*Hello, my name is Sharon Pope.*

I am a certified Master Life Coach and a six-time international best-selling author on marriage and relationships.



I have been published dozens of times, including in The New York Times.

I help women get the clarity they need to know whether it's time to 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.

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