

## **HOW TO REPAIR A CRACKED MARRIAGE**

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Abby was intelligent and beautiful. For some reason, she married Al, a cantankerous, ill-mannered boor who turned out to be extremely ornery. Many a woman would have walked out on him. Yet, she found her niche in history by holding on.

If a prince charming had visited Abby's mountain village, she doubtless would have become a princess. But none came along, and it seems that her parents encouraged her to go with Al. He probably turned no lights on for her, but she could have consoled herself with the thought that he was steady and solid. At least, he knew how to make money. Perhaps mom and dad encouraged her to believe that she could either change him or learn to love him. She shouldn't pass him up. He was the scion of a prominent family, destined to wealth and influence. With her warm, winsome ways, Abby would impart to his lordly ranch a touch of grace. She finally said "Yes" to him.

Soon after the wedding, Abby began crying herself to sleep. If someone had told her she had terminal cancer, she could have hardly felt more devastated than realizing that she was bound for life to someone who was a perfect fool when it came to human relations. Neighbors and the hired hands got so they avoided him whenever possible.

To make matters worse, Al took to drinking, and Abby learned that no problem can be so bad but what alcohol can make it worse. The hired help could leave, but Abby felt chained in a marital dungeon "till death do us part." Sometimes she half wished that death would come her way.

Covering for Al's boorish ways developed in Abby qualities of grace and diplomacy. She learned how to pour oil on the troubled waters Al had roiled up. The irritating grain of sand produced in her soul the legendary pearl. She developed a fantastic expertise in managing men who had trouble managing themselves. This eventually led to a new chapter in her life.

Abby got hold of a secret truth. Committed to the idea that "they [two] shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24), Abby began to understand that "they" being "one" meant that she and Al couldn't be separated, and that her eventual happiness depended on believing it. She began looking on Al's faults as "our" faults. It may seem small comfort to

some discouraged person, but the fact is that she became more talented and beautiful in the process of enduring disappointment.

Abby remained faithful to Al, believing that God in His own good time and way would transmute her pain into happiness. To the end of her marriage, she kept her conscience clear, holding the ranch together, winning the love of the hired help and the neighbors, and in the process carving out for herself a special niche of distinction in female history.

Al's drinking problem finally did him in. After sobering up from a binge he fell into a fit of depression that turned into despair and ended in death. Everybody for miles around believed that the Lord had simply called time on the old curmudgeon. And, believe it or not, when Abby was free, a prince did show up who married her. Her story is one of the best authenticated case histories on record. You can check the details in 1 Samuel 25:2-42.

We read there that "Nabal . . . was harsh and evil in his dealings," but "Abigail . . . was intelligent and beautiful in appearance." Verse 3, NASB. God took the trouble to delineate her story as an encouragement to millions of people since.

David, Israel's rightful heir to the throne, happened on the scene. In an unpleasant encounter, Nabal rubbed him the wrong way and David in a rare fit of anger decided to avenge the insult with violence. But for Abigail's intervention, David's rash act would have haunted his royal conscience for the rest of his life and could have ruined his reputation as a fair and compassionate ruler. Abby's well developed skills in diplomacy and exquisitely tactful finesse saved David from himself. Her hastily composed but eloquent speech pointedly reminded him that his rashness could be the undoing of his royal honor. Never has a woman averted tragedy so skillfully.

Unlovable as Nabal was, Abigail was protective of her unworthy husband. She assumed his guilt—"upon me . . . let this iniquity be." "I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine hand-maid." Verses 24, 28. She implied that Nabal's faults were hers as well as his, for were not the two "one flesh"?

Abby's plea that her husband's life be spared is patently sincere, so much so that it proved effective. While all this was going on, Nabal was getting high in a wild drinking spree. Abby waited until he sobered up and then told him how close he had come to disaster. The record says, "His heart died within him, and he became as a

stone. And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died.” Verses 37, 38.

In due time, when she was free, David married Abigail. See verse 42. The king-to-be not only loved her; he felt she would help him manage his own weaknesses.

Nabal was not merely ornery; he was obviously impossible. Yet God had a solution to that marriage problem. Abigail’s unhappy marriage should encourage us to believe that there can be hope for happiness even in such “impossible” situations. If so, there must be much more hope for those many situations that are difficult rather than hopelessly impossible.

The story of Abigail reveals that God Himself undertakes to help the unlucky spouse who is getting the bad end of a bargain. He or she can find happiness in fidelity, through unexpected ways. God never went to sleep on Abigail, nor did He abandon her. To Him who sees when the sparrow falls, Abigail and her unhappy marriage were important. Her story became immortalized for all ages and even for eternity to come.

It is naive to expect that we will never have to taste of pain imposed by less-than-perfect situations outside of us. What is important is to know that inner sense of well-being, of a clear conscience, of peace with God and the assurance that He is proud of you for what you are where you are. All this Abigail knew, and it was the secret of her charm and impressive beauty when she comes onto the Bible stage.

Abigail can become the patron saint of the Federation of Unlucky Spouses, whether wives or husbands. It is good to realize that you and your situation are important to the Lord and that He is concerned for your marital happiness. We must find out what He is doing about it! His solution to the problem may not be as simple as zapping a difficult spouse. There may be a much happier solution to the problem than eliminating either the spouse or the marriage. What should be eliminated is the irritant that is causing the problem.

We know that at first Adam was gloriously happy with Eve. But later he blamed her for their fall (Gen. 3:12), so they must have had “problems” like everybody else all through time. But for sure after the fall they were together far longer than any of us, and they never divorced. We read: “the Lord God . . . *brought* [Eve] to the man [Adam].”

This is not suggesting that one should go to sleep and then the

Lord will—presto—bring you a wonderful spouse all ready to be yours. The common sense idea is that you ask for, you trust, you expect, you *wait for* the Lord to *lead* the two of you together. It's not a game of conquest in which your ego is flattered. Happiness that endures is based on confidence in the leading of the Lord. The lesson from Adam and Eve is that the Lord God takes an active, personal interest in your life. Let Him do the leading, and your union will be lasting.

Jesus comments on their marriage when He says, “What . . . God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:6). The glue that will hold a married couple together is not their exercise of strong will power. No, it's their conviction, their faith, that “*God* has joined [us] together.”

Of course, part of that confidence is the faith that not only does God exist, but “He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Believing is a choice even when you don't feel like believing. You must choose to believe the fundamental truth that *God is love* (1 Jn. 4:8). That confidence is a rock-bottom necessity in knowing how to live for even one day. You can't live if you think He is mean or unfair or cruel; believing Satan's lie about Him is the sure path to eternal sorrow. Once you make that choice to believe the truth, the trusting becomes easy.

Believing that God loves you is the important step; even when you think things have gone badly for you, you remember the cross of Jesus. He felt that God had forever forsaken Him, but the truth is that the Father had never truly forsaken Him. The Father's love was steadfast. The cross is the story of “good news” forever. You choose to believe even when everything seems to force you to disbelieve. God is a loving heavenly Father who above all else has in mind your true happiness; and in His infinite wisdom He sees and knows that such happiness lies with your being faithful to the “wife [husband] of your youth” (Mal. 2:14).

Such faith does work miracles, and transforms what the devil tempts you to think is purgatory into happy matrimony. The Bible story about marriage from the beginning is love; God created us to love and to be loved in devotion that lasts forever.

**Abraham and Sarah.** God called Abraham to be our example in faith—to be “the father of all those who believe” (Rom. 4:11). And his wife was to share with him that honor of “faith”—prestige.

Their marriage was to result in seven grand blessings for the

world, most of all, that “in you all families [homes, marriages] of the earth shall be blessed [made happy]” (Gen. 12:2, 3). Abraham and Sarah were called to be the world’s most understanding father-in-law and mother-in-law!

But their own happiness turned out to be a long time in coming. So long, in fact, that both husband and wife thought the only way they’d reach their goal was to break their marriage vows—that is, to let a third party in. That was the story of Hagar, which was so tragic in its effects that people even today still suffer because of what Abraham did (Israelis versus Palestinians, for example).

In that marriage of Abraham and Sarah you have all the elements that make for alienation and divorce as we know it today: (1) disappointment with the marriage and with each other; (2) a wife who is bitter and alienated and angry with God (read Genesis 16:2); (3) a husband who is all too ready to grab the excuse to go for the “other woman”—Hagar.

The result of that affair was disastrous. And their expected happiness and personal fulfillment didn’t come. In fact, you’ll find they waited twenty-five long years before they could realize the fulfilled married happiness they had been wanting, the something God had promised them. That yearning joint desire was for the birth of *their* son—not only for personal gratification but as a token that their faith in worshipping the one true God was valid. This was more crucial to their peace of mind than personal nuptial bliss. If God turns out to be a false-Promiser that would be the end of all joy.

Still today, mutual confidence in religion is a most desirable element in married happiness; you never reap peace of mind by choosing sexual fulfillment ahead of religious union.

At one church the conference assigned us an associate pastor. His wife hated being a pastor’s wife while he loved being a pastor. She had little or no interest in spiritual things. He loved the Lord. This made for some interesting conflicts as he sought to minister to the people.

In his boyhood young Abraham had tried to persuade his moon-worshipping father Terah that they should worship the One who had created the moon. Now with the birth of their truly first-born son, Isaac, the old couple realized a joy unspeakable in the verification of their faith, and their confidence that God had brought them together.

When the blessing finally came with that birth of Isaac, it was just in time to save them from the bitterness that old-age marriage-

failure can bring:

Abraham humbly repented of his sin—which was more than mere lust; his sin was not just infatuation with the “good looking” younger woman; there was the darker sin involved of deep heart-unbelief in God’s promise that he and Sarah should together have a son (such faith makes it impossible for either husband or wife to yield to the temptation of lust).

Sarah repented of her anger against God. We know this because Hebrews 11:11 says: “By faith Sarah herself also received strength [finally!] to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.” Her previous unbelief and bitterness of soul had closed up the secret biological processes that make conception possible. The faith that she finally grasped was what is always a heart-melting appreciation of the love of Christ that led Him to search for us and rescue us from hell. It melted her hard and proud matronly heart; tears of contrition dampened her cheeks at last as her heart-melt released the closed biological doors within her reproductive system. Genuine faith had renewed her youth!

The truth in this memorable marriage is: *believe* the promise that God gave you of happiness in your marriage. That believing will give you happy and peaceful endurance, and a rich reward that indulgence with a third party could never bring you.

**David and Bathsheba.** The Bible tells of one memorable marriage that was built on a platform of lust. And yet God blessed it!

Perhaps taking a brief look at the marriage of David and Bathsheba can encourage some who must look back on their past and wonder if God can ever bless their marriage. Yes, He can! This story is a vast encouragement.

What they did was the totally wrong way to do anything. Bathsheba apparently enticed David; he lusted, used his position to seduce her (surely, a double sin!), then murdered her husband in order to cover it up (“Davidgate,” now a triple sin or crime).

Then he brazenly married Bathsheba, as though nothing had happened. Bad, all the way around. It would be difficult to make a worse mess. So, “good-bye,” God’s blessings?

No, there’s still grace from heaven, and at the same time God will uphold His holy law.

There’s one little smidgen of goodness left in David: we read that after the murder of Bathsheba’s husband and the rebuke of the

prophet Nathan and the death of their baby boy, “David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her, and lay with her” (2 Sam. 12:24). There was nothing David could do to make restitution to Uriah her husband, or to her; but he could have ditched Bathsheba to get her out of his life and go after someone else. That would have left her to sorrow alone forever. No, he’d made a bad bargain, but he remained loyal to it. He had ruined her marriage by doing away with her husband, now he chose not to ruin her life by abandoning her.

I remember reading of wise counsel given by someone who knew the Lord, about a man who had wrecked several women’s lives and had finally ended up with number so-and-so, and the church members wanted him to get rid of her and go back to number one. This counselor said that he had already ruined several women’s lives; now don’t make him ruin another one’s, let him stay where he is. David and Bathsheba had a shameful beginning; but they ended up giving Solomon to the world.

That shouldn’t encourage us to repeat David’s sin; but it should encourage us to emulate his repentance. In Psalm 51 he confesses himself as deserving of eternal death; no attempt to excuse himself in the least. “Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God.” He knows he has participated in the murder of the Son of God. He is broken-hearted as he prays to the Lord. But thank God, “A broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.”

In this psalm David has forever defined for us what repentance is. And what faith is—the Lord will not despise a broken-hearted repentance.

**Hosea and Gomer.** Have you ever heard the story of the memorable marriage that fell apart because God told the man in the first place to marry a bad woman? It’s in the Bible. God actually told His prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute (Hosea 3:1). How could such a marriage *not* fall apart?

Of course the lady Gomer played her husband false. He was forced to watch her flirt with other men in his presence. And then the flirting became outright adultery. She had no excuse, for the record is clear that Hosea was not a bad husband; he gave Gomer all her heart could wish for. She was just plain faithless. “Infidelity” is the word. And there was nothing the grieving husband could do but wait.

The problem was that he actually loved this woman! In fact, for him there was no other in the world who could take her place. The modern way is that if your true love is betrayed, you chuck it and grab

someone else. Hosea's heart was gold, for he was captive to his love for her, the kind of love that Paul says "never fails" (1 Cor. 13:8). What could the poor man do? Just . . . suffer.

Well, the time came that her lovers inevitably demonstrated their faithlessness, leaving Gomer to end up a miserable wreck in the slave market (Hosea 3:2). Her original, true husband bought her for a paltry sum, was nice to her, and miracle of miracles, aroused some love in her devastated heart, and helped her find repentance. (Have you ever seen such a case in real life?) Before Hosea could "save" a soul, he had to start from scratch and "build" a soul—yet *to be saved*.

They finally walk off the Bible stage hand in hand, in love forever, *the* memorable "hopeless" marriage of the ages.

How could Hosea, sinner though he was by nature, have ever been able to love a loveless, faithless woman?

He learned how from the God of Israel, who is our "Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). Gomer is Israel. And Israel is "we," the church—the Bride-to-be of Jesus. There is enough in this story to keep you and me studying, praying, pondering, and repenting, for a lifetime.

**Christ's Bride-to-be.** The most memorable marriage of all time and eternity will be one that most people have never thought of. The idea is so strange, that it seems out of this world. But the Bible tells about it in Revelation 19:6-8: Jesus Himself is going to get married! "The Lord God omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready." And the Good News is that you and I are invited to attend the wedding and the marriage feast: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come.' And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (22:17). This will be the grandest party ever held anywhere, anytime, bar none!

Why should Jesus want to get married? The answer is clear: He has become a human being, to retain His human nature forever. He is a man, as well as being the eternal Son of God. It is He who created us male and female, and ordained holy marriage as an object lesson to help us understand His love for His church.

No woman on earth could ever become the Bride of the Son of God; but in a corporate sense, the church that welcomes Him at His second coming becomes His Bride.

Revelation says this wedding hasn't happened *yet*. It must take



place before Jesus can return the second time as He promised, “I will come [back] again” (John 14:3). In other words, for the church to be ready for the marriage of the Lamb will require a growing up to the whole “measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” as Paul says in Ephesians 4:13. That’s more than just getting ready to die and be buried, to sleep and await the resurrection. This is getting ready for translation without seeing death. As 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 says, “We who are alive and remain [after the first resurrection] shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

Now, around the world, God is preparing that people. Nothing happening in the world today is as important. Getting ready to be a “guest” at this marriage is an experience closely related to the cleansing of the sanctuary on this final Day of Atonement in which we now live.

This “preparing” is happening now. “Whoever wills” can be in on it. You are invited to be present at this wedding.