I Don’t Want a Divorce

A 90 DAY GUIDE
TO SAVING YOUR MARRIAGE

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Dr. David Clarke with William G. Clarke,
_I Don’t Want a Divorce: A 90 Day Guide to Saving Your Marriage_,
Contents

Part 1  Yes, You Can Change Your Marriage

1. The Good News about a Bad Marriage    11

Part 2   The “We’re Unhappy but Willing to Work on It” Marriage

2. “Take Your Marriage Out Back and Shoot It!”    25
   Week 1  Rebuild from the Ground Up    26
3. “I’m Wrong, I’m Sorry, I’ll Change”    38
   Week 2  The Letter of Responsibility    45
   Week 3  Do the Top Two    51
4. Where the Rubber Meets the Road: One Couple’s Journey through Weeks 2 and 3    53
5. A Breath of Fresh, Positive Air    65
   Week 4  The Power of Positivity    69
6. A Little Bit of Romance Goes a Long Way    78
   Week 5  Bring Back the Romance    81
7. Conflict-Resolving Skills That Work    90
   Week 6  Learn How to Fight    92
8. Heal from Your Past Pain    103
   Week 7  The Past Pain Transfer Letters    110
   Week 8  The Follow-Up Talks    116
Contents

9. The Pain Is Gone and We’re Moving On: One Couple’s Journey through Weeks 7 and 8  118
10. Forgive Each Other  129
   Week 9 The Letters of Forgiveness  134
   Week 10 Read and Follow-Up Talks  136
11. “I Forgive You”: One Couple’s Journey through Weeks 9 and 10  140
12. The Code Queen and the Clam  151
   Week 11 Make Your Needs Clear  157
13. To Be Soul Mates, You Have to Be “Need Mates”  162
   Week 12 Meet Your Top Three Needs  165

Part 3 The “My Spouse Won’t Change” Marriage

14. “I Married a Stick and Now I’m Stuck”  179
15. Your Stick’s Last Chance  190
16. Rock Your Stick’s World  204

Part 4 The “My Spouse Has Sinned Big Time” Marriage

17. Make Your Spouse’s Serious Sin the Only Issue  219
18. Get Angry and Stay Angry  230
19. How to Heal from a Spouse’s Serious Sin  241

Part 5 With God and a Proven Plan, It’s Time to Change Your Marriage

20. Killing Your Goliath  261

Frequently Asked Questions  267
Appendix: Beginning a Relationship with God  273
Part 1

Yes, You Can Change Your Marriage
Your marriage is in trouble. That’s why you picked up this book. You’re not happy. Your spouse isn’t happy. Your marriage is not on the right track. Needs are not being met. You never thought your marriage would get to this. But it has.

You don’t want a divorce.

You want intimacy. You want passion. You want to feel in love again. And the sooner the better.

If you’re in a marriage that needs to be saved, I have good news and more good news.

The Good News

The first piece of good news is that you are not alone. You and your spouse are part of a huge club with millions of members. Just about every marriage breaks down and ends up in trouble. It is the nature of the beast.
In 1 Corinthians 7:28, the apostle Paul has this to say about marriage:

Those who marry will face many troubles in this life.

Yeah. No kidding. I almost used these ten words as the title of this book. Paul is communicating a universal truth: Every married couple will be forced to deal with many difficulties.

You fall in love. Neither one of you has a clue about the problems that will begin to hit you just a few years into marriage—sometimes just a few months into marriage. This naïve ignorance is a blessing. If any of us had the slightest inkling of the potholed road ahead, no one would ever get married. The human race would die quickly.

With bright eyes and bright hopes, you get married. Your hormone-driven passion peters out eighteen months after the wedding day. Your male-female differences, annoying habits, and ever-increasing conflicts put a pounding on your love. Add a child or two and now you’re really in for it.

You spend less and less time together. You don’t talk on a deep level. You can’t remember the last personal conversation you had. Romance and affection are way down. Sex is infrequent and not too exciting. You fight more and more and can’t resolve disagreements. Or worse, you avoid conflicts by avoiding each other and touchy subjects.

Sound familiar? This progressive breakdown in a marriage happens to 99.99 percent of all couples who tie the knot. Including my wife, Sandy, and me. If you are in that .01 percent of couples who have weathered the storms without breaking down, congratulations. I mean it. You are the extraordinary exception.

If your marriage is good, and you want to make it better, this book isn’t for you. Give it to a couple who needs it. If your marriage is currently bad and you want to make it better, a lot better, this book is for you.
The Good News about a Bad Marriage

The Three Troubled Marriages

So the question is not, “Is your marriage struggling?” We’ve established that it is. The two questions to be answered are: “How is your marriage struggling?” and “What can you do about it?”

As a clinical psychologist in private practice for more than twenty-three years, specializing in marital therapy, I have answers to both these questions.

The answer to the first question is this: Almost all troubled marriages fall into one of three categories.

The “We’re Unhappy but Willing to Work on It” Marriage

Your marriage is not doing well, but neither of you has taken serious, damaging actions. And you both are willing to take steps to improve your relationship.

Marriages in this category, unhappy but experiencing no outrageous or deeply harmful behavior, tend to come in four types. See if you recognize yours.

“Hey, We’re Okay.”

Your marriage is okay. Fair. Mediocre. You’re comfortable with each other. You feel stable and secure. What you don’t feel is passion. Oh, you still love each other. But the thrill is gone.

Your marriage is based on commitment and routine, not intimacy. You’re not sweethearts anymore. Your sex is still fairly frequent, but it is a five on a scale of one to ten. You work at your careers. You take care of the kids. You do household chores. You pay the bills. You visit your families. Exciting? No. Predictable and boring? Oh yeah.

Even though you’re not terribly unhappy, you still have a bad marriage. It is far less than what it could be, and you know it. You are settling for a go-kart when you could have a Corvette. Being okay with an okay marriage is not okay. If you don’t change your marriage pretty quickly, it will get worse. A lot worse. And it won’t take a long time.
Yes, You Can Change Your Marriage

“We’re Not Okay.”

Your marriage is in trouble, and you are aware of it. No one has made a move toward divorce. In fact, no one has mentioned divorce. But you’re both unhappy. Your feelings of love are greatly diminished. There are more negatives than positives in the relationship.

You are often irritated by your spouse’s annoying habits and weaknesses. You are having more and more conflicts, usually over petty issues. You don’t have deep, intimate, revealing conversations. You rarely go out on romantic dates. You’re not playful with each other. Your kisses are stale, forced, and pathetically weak. Sex still happens sporadically, but it is more about meeting a biological need than about expressing love.

You’re beginning to lead separate lives. You are avoiding each other. Your relationship doesn’t give you energy. It sucks the energy and life right out of you. You’re staying together because of commitment and because of the children.

You’re not sure how much longer you can hold on. You’ve thought about divorce, even though you really don’t want one. You find yourself wondering what it would be like to split up and be on your own. You begin to notice members of the opposite sex and find yourself attracted to them.

You don’t realize it, but unless you are totally committed to following God’s direction, you are an affair waiting to happen. Your marriage isn’t dead yet, but it is in intensive care on life support.

“We’re Miserable.”

Your marriage has suffered a complete breakdown. It’s dead. It’s over. There are no feelings of love left. I call this kind of relationship Dead Marriage Walking.

You want out of your marriage. Or your spouse wants out. Divorce has been mentioned, probably many times. One spouse has filed for divorce or is on the verge of filing.

One spouse may have uttered those five horrible words: “I don’t love you anymore.” You are leading largely separate
The Good News about a Bad Marriage

lives. There is very little interaction. You don’t see any hope for your marriage. It’s only a matter of time before it is ended. An affair may be happening or be close to happening.

You realize you have to do something, and quickly, or you’ll either become more miserable or get divorced.

“It’s All about the Kids.”

Since the birth of your first child, your marriage has never been the same. You went from soul mates to superparents overnight. The product of your love has become the central focus of your love.


Your kids have become more important—a lot more important—than your marriage. Most of your time, energy, and attention go to the kids. Most of your joy comes from the kids. You are making the mistake of thinking parenting is the most important thing that you can do. But the truth is, loving each other is the most important thing that you can do.

Kids are important, but they are number two. Number one is your marriage. When your marriage takes a backseat to anyone or anything else except the Lord, it suffers great harm. Your marriage is dying, and you may not even realize it.

The “My Spouse Won’t Change” Marriage

Your spouse seems content with your marriage, even though it’s lousy and has very little deep satisfaction or intimacy in it. He wants to stay with you and has no desire to divorce you, but he will do nothing to improve the relationship. Occasionally, he’ll make a lame, half-hearted attempt to do some things differently, but it never lasts long.

Dr. David Clarke with William G. Clarke,
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You know what you’re missing and are willing to do whatever it takes to enrich your marriage. You ask him to go to a marriage seminar. He says no. You ask him to read a marriage book like this one. He says no. You ask him to see your pastor or a Christian therapist. He says no. Even if he “tries” one of these options, he makes zero changes.

You are sick and tired of hearing his “no” to your every attempt to make some progress in your relationship. You wonder, “How can I motivate my slug of a husband to want to work on our marriage?”

The “My Spouse Has Sinned Big Time” Marriage

Your spouse has committed a serious, major sin, and you are reeling from the impact.

You have just discovered the sin or have finally had enough of a chronic, long-standing pattern of sinful behavior.

Sin is an ugly, nasty word. But it is the only word I can use to describe a behavior that shatters the trust of a spouse and breaks that person’s heart into a million pieces. It is the only word God used to describe a behavior that inflicts such terrible damage on a spouse, a marriage, and a family. When I use the word sin, I’m talking about major, huge, massive offenses that tear apart the very core of a marriage.

He has committed adultery. (I’ll use the male pronoun in these categories for convenience, although the woman could be the serious sinner.) He has been viewing pornography. He has been abusing alcohol and/or drugs. He has a nasty temper and has been verbally abusive to you. He has been physically abusing you. He is a workaholic. He has a gambling addiction. He has made terrible and costly, reckless and irresponsible financial mistakes. He has controlled every area of your life. He refuses to work hard at a career.

The only thing that gives you hope is that your spouse wants to stop sinning, stay with you, and work on the marriage.
You wonder, though, “How can we heal from the trauma of the sin and build a new marriage?”

More Good News

Is your marriage in one of these three categories? Are you asking yourself that second question, “What can I do about it?” This brings me to the second piece of good news about your struggling marriage:

I have a 90-Day Guide to Saving Your Marriage.

I didn’t come up with this phrase because it makes a catchy title. I do have a plan. I’ve used it with hundreds of married couples in my clinical practice over the past twenty years. I know it works. It can save your marriage by changing your marriage.

Let me be clear. Saving your marriage is very important. That’s the purpose of this book. But I don’t want, and I’m sure you don’t want, to simply avoid divorce and be stuck in the same old miserable marriage. I’m going to help you avoid divorce by changing your marriage into a marriage that really works.

So for the rest of this book, I’ll be using these words: Change Your Marriage.

A Do-It-Yourself Program

This 90-day program is designed to be used by you and your spouse on your own. It is a step-by-step program that the two of you can follow without any outside help (except God and your accountability partners). If, however, after the 90 days, during which you diligently and fully followed the steps, you don’t experience at least some significant improvement in the major issues hurting your marriage, please see your pastor or a licensed Christian therapist for additional guidance.
Yes, You Can Change Your Marriage

If you are a pastor or are involved in a ministry to hurting couples, I think you’ll find this program very helpful in your counseling work. When your spouse and you try this, you will better understand how it can help others.

Change in Twelve Weeks

Ninety days is twelve weeks. I see couples in therapy once a week, so my plan unfolds over the course of twelve weeks. Here’s a brief overview of my Change Your Marriage in Twelve Weeks Plan:

Week 1: Rebuild from the Ground Up

A solid foundation is critically important to building a brand-new marriage. Your building blocks are (1) God, (2) Accountability Partners, and (3) regular Couple Talk Times.

Weeks 2 and 3: “I’m Wrong, I’m Sorry, I’ll Change”

Focusing on your spouse’s faults won’t get you anywhere. Identifying and working on your faults will produce the beginning of change.

Weeks 4 and 5: Pump In the Positives

Your marriage has enough negatives. You are in desperate need of positives to provide momentum, hope, and healing. Caring behaviors, compliments, communication skills, small romantic behaviors, and praying together will create positive, healthy connections. Only by following the steps and experiencing them will you see them work.

Week 6: Learn How to Fight

All couples have conflict. Very few know how to successfully resolve it. With some tried-and-true conflict-resolution
skills, you and your spouse will be able to work through your past and current conflicts and gain the tools for your future conflicts.

**Weeks 7 and 8: Heal from Your Past Pain**
Both of you have unresolved pain from your pasts. Your pain is connected to people: parents, siblings, other family members, friends, teachers, coaches or other authority figures, neighbors, old boyfriends or girlfriends, and ex-spouses. This pain transfers to your spouse and damages your marriage. Together, you can heal from your pain and eliminate the transfer.

**Weeks 9 and 10: Forgive Each Other**
You’ve done and said things to hurt each other over the years. These hurts have continued to fester and do incredible damage to your relationship. It’s time to clear out your resentments, truly forgive, and move ahead with a clean slate.

**Weeks 11 and 12: Meet Your Deepest Needs**
To have a great marriage, your real needs must be met on a regular basis. I’ll show you how to communicate your emotional, physical, and spiritual needs and have them met.

**How to Use the Book**
Depending on which category of troubled marriage you’re in, here’s how you navigate through this Change Your Marriage program:
If you’re in the “We’re Unhappy but Willing to Work on It” marriage, you read Chapters 2 through 13. These chapters contain my twelve-week Change Your Marriage program. You can skip Chapters 14 through 19 and then read Chapter 20.
If you’re in the first category, “We’re Unhappy but Willing to Work on It,” and your spouse won’t read the book, no problem. You read it first, and then guide your reading-challenged spouse through the steps of my program. If your spouse won’t read the book and refuses to follow the Change Your Marriage steps, you automatically shift into the “My Spouse Won’t Change” marriage, and you follow that route through the book.

If you’re in the “My Spouse Won’t Change” marriage, by definition you will read and do this twelve-week program on your own. Read Chapter 2 and complete the steps for Week 1. Then read Chapters 3 through 13 to understand the six additional steps, and read Chapters 14 through 16 for specific instructions on how to motivate your stubborn spouse to change. You can skip Chapters 17 through 19 and finish by reading Chapter 20.

Living with a spouse who refuses to change is an ongoing nightmare. I’m going to help you end the nightmare using biblical, practical, tough-love action steps. After completing each of the program’s seven steps, you’ll ask your spouse to also complete that step. If your spouse will not do any of the steps, it’s time to bring out the heavy, biblical artillery.

Your difficult and stupid (the Bible refers to this person as a fool) spouse will be backed into a corner and forced to make a decision. Your foolish spouse will change or not change, but you will be content knowing that you have done all God wanted you to do and that he empowered you to do in the marriage.

If you’re in the “My Spouse Has Sinned Big Time” marriage, start with Chapter 2 and complete Week 1’s steps. Then jump ahead and read and apply Chapters 17 through 19 to begin to concentrate on the process of healing from the sin’s traumatic impact. After that you’ll be prepared to go back and read Chapters 3 through 13 and do the rest of my Change Your Marriage steps. You’ll finish by reading Chapter 20, the final chapter, and reading my closing words of motivation and—hopefully—inspiration.
You may ask, “What if my sinning spouse refuses to follow your steps of healing?” My answer, which involves some heavy-duty tough love, is found in Chapter 19.

It’s Time for a Change

You’re sick of your marriage. You ought to be. It’s not working. It’s broken down. It’s painful rather than joyful. It’s time to leave your old marriage behind. Stop your car, dump your marriage on the side of the road, and move on. You’re not going back to it.

What you can do is build a brand-new marriage with your current spouse.

I consider it a sacred privilege to work with married couples whose relationships are in trouble, who are being robbed of joy in this most important of human relationships. I have the greatest job in the world. I get to help couples to refuse to get a divorce and to follow the steps of healing and recovery and restored happiness. I get to see God at work and to watch couples fall in love again and create a healthy, God-inspired, God-maintained intimacy.

I thank God for the hundreds of success stories I’ve been involved with over the years of my practice and in my seminar ministry. (I’ve provided tools and impetus; the couples did the work.)

The principles in this book helped Sandy and me get through some difficult periods in our relationship. We’ve been married since 1982, and our love continues to get stronger and deeper.

I thank God in advance for what he’s going to do for your marriage.

Paul, quoting Genesis 2:24, records this wonderful definition of marriage:

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

Ephesians 5:31
Yes, You Can Change Your Marriage

These two words, *one flesh*, describe a deeply intimate and passionate marriage relationship expressed physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

This is the kind of marriage God wants you and your spouse to have. It’s the kind of marriage God wants every couple to have.

No matter where your marriage is now, you can change it into becoming this kind of marriage.

In twelve weeks.