

Stacey's Story: Desperate Marriages and the Song of Solomon

I have observed a different effect on men than women who have suffered for years, and even decades, in a loveless marriage. Over time, a woman's emotional nature changes as she loses her ability to cry over her husband's rejection. A man reacts entirely different and cries easily when his wife makes him feel like a sexual beggar. However, his wife may never see his tears of devastating emotional pain. These are survival techniques of loving spouses who feel trapped in an emotionally empty marriage.

After I taught *The Song of Solomon: God's Sex Education for Ages 11 Through 99* in 1990, I thought the Song of Solomon was not the place to start for people in these desperate marriages. Let me share with you the experience that caused me to come to that false conclusion. Then I want to explain why I now believe the Song of Solomon is a 3000-year-old blessing from God for these miserable marriages that man's knowledge is finally catching up with.

Several weeks into teaching the Song of Solomon classes for teenagers, their mothers, and grandmothers, a woman in her late sixties, whom I'll call Donna, came to talk to me. Dry eyed, without emotion, she said, "It's all I can do to sit through your classes. I don't know if I can hang on until you finish the Song of Solomon and start teaching the classes on spouse abuse.... This is my second marriage.... My present husband physically abused me until my grown son took him out in the front yard and beat him up. My son told him, 'If you ever lay another hand on my mother, I will give you more of the same.'"

She drank a sip of water and continued, "My husband no longer hits me. But the daily verbal abuse has destroyed my spirit. I'm a shadow of the woman I was when we married."

I shared with Donna my reasoning on the order of the classes. I was teaching the Song of Solomon first to allow people in miserable marriages to see what a healthy relationship looks and feels like. This would give them goals to work toward. And then I would teach *Challenges in Marriage: What to Do When Sin Inhibits Love*. The second scriptural study of how to stand up to abuse would give the women insights for changing their marriages.

I encouraged Donna to keep coming to the Song of Solomon lessons. I told her I would help her apply the principles in the *Challenges* classes. She required lots of private reinforcement to stay the course and do the homework. But she did. Other women, dealing with similar issues, just dropped out of the classes rather than talking to me about their pain.

After the classes ended, one of the men in the congregation and I met with Donna and her husband in their home each week for several months. The husband's verbal abuse was out in the open. We didn't hint at it, dance around it, or accept excuses for it.

Donna finally experienced validation of her suffering and she spoke freely. Whether her husband was sincere in his comments and desires to change, I don't know. But in the *Challenges in Marriage* classes, Donna developed skills for holding him accountable for his words and actions. She had more strength than she realized and she never walked on eggshells around him again.

As Christians contacted me wanting to use the MP3s of the two series for classes around their dining room tables and in their congregations, I told them about this experience. I advised them to start with *Challenges in Marriage* first, then teach God's ideal from the Song of Solomon.

Several years later, two men told me how listening to the Song of Solomon MP3s made them cry. Both men had suffered for decades married to wives who tolerated sex and rebuffed daytime touching and affection. They said the descriptions of how a loving woman enjoys her husband's touch of her breasts and initiates lovemaking caused them to sob at the reminder of how far removed their marriages were from God's plan.

Another husband confided in me how he couldn't stop crying for weeks after he committed adultery to get out of a so-called Christian marriage with an unloving woman. He tried everything he

knew from romancing her to blowing up in anger at his frustrations. No matter what he did, she remained untouchable emotionally and sexually.

“My Spouse Is Perfect Except for Sex.”

In nearly every desperate marriage, the person has said to me, "My spouse is perfect except for sex." Then the person lists all the good qualities of the spouse. But the emotional devastation the person suffers is heart wrenching. Yet the "perfect spouse" doesn't seem to notice the mate's overwhelming loneliness and feeling unloved.

I reject this notion that the unloving spouse is perfect except for sex. It's a lie loving husbands and wives tell themselves to survive an emotionally and sexually bankrupt marriage. It's a fantasy emotionally deprived mates believe because they falsely think nearly everyone is a good person at heart—just like they are. It's a fictional story that hurting husbands and wives invent to motivate themselves to keep working harder and harder to turn their marriages around.

The truth? Dr. Weiss explains that unloving spouses deliberately inflict emotional and sexual pain on their mates. They are experts at making comments and picking fights to ruin special moments of intimacy. He cites numerous examples of how anorexics are devious and punish their unsuspecting mate. They do this to distance themselves emotionally from their mates. Such a spouse is far from being perfect. As the marriage ages, their self-delusional blame and mistreatment of their spouse increases. It never gets better until the problem is addressed. However, Dr. Weiss does offer hope.

“My Spouse Is a Wonderful Parent.”

This is a close second lie to the first one. In fact, it often supports the first untruth. Again, “No, your spouse is not a wonderful mother or father.” People who don't know how to love their mate are clueless about how to love their children. It's impossible for a person to close up his or her heart toward the spouse and have it overflowing with emotional love for the children. If we think otherwise, we deceive ourselves.

The adult children of these unloving parents talk to me all the time. Many of them have rejected Christianity because of the emotional suffering they endured from a mother or father who pretended to be perfect except for sex. My experience is that the number-one reason adult children turn their back on God is because they grew up living with their parents' hypocrisy. They watched their parents claiming to love God, all the while failing to practice love for each other or them.

Solomon Was Perfect Except for Sex

What does all this have to do with studying the Song of Solomon? Solomon's wives could have said, “Solomon is perfect except for sex.” I was fortunate during the rewriting of my previous chapters on the Song of Solomon to read Dr. Weiss' books and workbooks on intimacy anorexia. I recognized Solomon as the perfect embodiment of a spouse who doesn't know how to love the mate intellectually, emotionally, or sexually. Additionally, both the Shulammitte and the Shepherd demonstrate the qualities of a loving mate.

Dr. Weiss' material has been eye opening as I look back over 40-plus years of being the confidante of both husbands and wives. In his first book, *Intimacy Anorexia*, he quotes both the anorexics and their spouses. He addresses *Married & Alone* primarily to neglected spouses to show that, while they endure a roommate relationship instead of a marriage, they're not alone in their suffering. He also helps readers work through options for their marriage.

Why I Stress Intellectual, Emotional, and Sexual Love

I began to learn this important lesson from a husband, I'll call Harold, who confided in me about

why his wife divorced him after a decades-long marriage. He said, "I never learned how to love a woman emotionally and sexually." He didn't say "my wife;" he said, "a woman." He didn't know how to love any woman.

Harold continued, "If my wife had had sexual experiences before we married, she would have known what a sick puppy I am...how incapable I am of loving a woman. I never put in the effort to learn how to do better. Now it's too late."

As I read the true stories in *Intimacy Anorexia*, I recognized many of Harold's characteristics through details both he and his wife shared with me. His wife thought that since he wasn't interested in sex with her, Harold was adultery proof. How wrong she was as she discovered in their later years that he had been an adulterer most of their marriage – perhaps even unfaithful during courtship. Dr. Weiss shares in his book many similar stories about how men and women have suffered being unloved, untouched, and often betrayed.

Male anorexics often experience stronger temptations for overt sexual sins than emotionally healthy men do. Sexual addictions along with mental and physical adulterous acts provide opportunities for secret sexual release with little intimate attachment to the object of their lust. Dr. Weiss says that after years of working with both male and female anorexics, "very few men and only some women avoid sex. However, both the men and the women were actively avoiding intimacy." (Douglas Weiss, *Intimacy Anorexia* [Colorado Springs, CO: Discovery Press, 2010], 8.)

We now know why when a man has an affair, he often tells his wife, "She didn't mean anything to me, so it shouldn't be such a big deal to you." He's right; she didn't mean anything to him. But his wife doesn't mean anything to him either. He avoided intimacy with both the other woman and his wife.

Women, that society calls cougars, can be either dry flirts or active adulteresses. The Bible preserves the portrait of such a cougar going after a young man in Proverbs 7:6-23. (I devote a whole chapter in *God's People Make the Best Lovers* to this adulterous wife.) A lack of sexual love in the marriage makes the spouse more susceptible to sexual deviations, rather than adultery-proofing the mate.

As I went through the Song of Solomon, Harold's account of why his marriage failed provided a real-life, succinct way of comparing what the Shepherd pledges to the Shulammitte with what Solomon can't deliver – emotional and sexual love. Harold's intimacy inhibitions were so severe that he couldn't give his wife even a tenth of the love and affection the Shepherd promises the Shulammitte. No wonder the Maiden offers a prayer of tremendous thanksgiving to God for the Shepherd's manly qualities of being sexually mature and able to truly love a woman.

But Harold only figured out two thirds of why his marriage failed. Not only did he not know how to love a woman emotionally and sexually, but he also didn't know how to love a woman intellectually. He didn't respect, value, or honor his wife as a woman. God refuses to hear the prayers of such men as Harold (1 Peter 3:7).

His wife said, "He grew up hearing his father make fun of his mother every day at the dinner table. His dad disguised his ill-feelings toward his wife with humor. Harold and his siblings laughed at their dad's jokes...even his mother laughed." Through deceptive, abusive humor, Harold was programmed to believe women are inferior to men and objects of ridicule (Proverbs 26:18-19).

I've observed this same inability to love a mate intellectually many times. Often after studying my book *God's People Make the Best Lovers* and seeing firsthand the role of the brain in enjoying lovemaking, both men and women begin studying *God's People Appreciate Marriage*. They realize the need to educate their brains to value the opposite sex, so they can love their mate intellectually. Only when we give ourselves totally to our mate, can we imbibe in wonderful lovemaking.

To Harold's attempt to understand why his marriage failed, I've added that he needed to learn how to love his wife intellectually. He had neglected to unlearn his upbringing. When he tried to

ridicule his wife the same way his dad did his mother, his wife didn't laugh. Instead, she insisted he stop making her the brunt of his jokes. He stopped the public putdowns, but he continued to harbor them in his heart. This allowed him to justify withholding sexual and emotional love from her. He got away with this abuse until his wife found evidence of his unfaithfulness.

What the Song of Solomon Offers Desperate Marriages

If you're trying to survive a loveless marriage, then pay attention to the Resource Materials at the end of this chapter. The materials will open your eyes to what you're dealing with in your marriage. They will address your pain and help you not be so gullible to your mate's manipulations. Then as you study the Song of Solomon, you will gain insights into the scriptures for convicting your spouse of the gross sin of being unloving or "without natural affection" (1 Timothy 3:1-5—ASV).

Additionally, you'll find your love for God increasing as you see his bountiful love for us and his desire that we all partake of wonderful marriages. You'll begin to understand that God doesn't trap anyone in a harmful, loveless marriage. He provides multiple tools for correcting the situation.

If you're a preacher, elder, deacon, older woman, or someone who works with others, I encourage you to also do the Research Exercise. It will make you much more effective in helping others as you won't be so naive when couples come to you for help. These materials would have accelerated my own understanding of the good, the bad, and the ugly of marriages, and especially the powerful teaching of the Song of Solomon.

The Song of Solomon is not only about analyzing your date to see if he or she would make a great marriage partner, it's also about looking at your marriage to determine its weaknesses and how you can strengthen it. While mankind didn't understand or know the name of intimacy anorexia until 2010, God has patiently exposed the concept of not being able to love the mate emotionally or sexually in all its depravity and cruelty for over 3000 years.

It's past time for us, as Christians, to learn what true love is all about. Then we can say with the apostle Paul, "If I do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-2). And "When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things" (verse 11).

Stacey's Story

To help readers who are struggling in an unloving marriage, Stacey (not her real name) gave permission to share her story. She emailed me in 2007 for help with her husband, Joe, who didn't show interest in having sex with her. I'll let her describe the problem in the next account of her story. You can follow her updates in short chapters between the Song of Solomon chapters. I contacted her before finishing this book to ask for a 2015 update and permission to share her story.

Her problem was the number one complaint I get from both husbands and wives—trying to survive marriage to a mate who isn't interested in lovemaking. In some marriages, it's just a matter of ignorance about God's teaching about sex. Those marriages usually turn around quickly when the couple studies God's scriptures such as the Song of Solomon.

Other marriages suffer from more deep-seated problems as Stacey's did. Stacey's husband Joe (not his real name) fought from his heart to keep things as they were. Then when she finally taught Joe how to fight fair so they could work on the real problems, when he changed, he changed from his heart. Seven years later, their love life just keeps getting better.

Unfortunately, not all mates have a good heart like Joe. Many are intimacy anorexics that Dr. Weiss writes about. They specialize in manipulating and degrading their wife or husband sexually. Some of those marriages can be saved, but not all can be.

If you are in a loveless marriage or are a preacher, elder, deacon, older woman, or someone who

works with others, I encourage you to put extra effort into your study of the Song of Solomon by going through this list of materials. These resources will open your eyes as they did mine. Dr. Weiss' books expose the core issues of most unloving unions. Studying these materials will help you be more effective in your efforts to save your marriage or in counseling couples.

If you were raised in a loveless home, expect to have problems in your marriage. Dr. Weiss wrote the last book in the list for you. It will open your eyes to the issues that shaped your parents – and you.

Resource Materials

1. *Intimacy Anorexia: Healing the Hidden Addiction in Your Marriage* by Douglas Weiss, Ph.D. This book is written to both the intimacy anorexic and the spouse. I recommend reading this one first if you are the spouse or a counselor. It offers a practical, workable plan for taking the marriage from a roommate existence to a loving relationship where both partners have smiles on their faces. In addition, it teaches the spouse how to know if the anorexic is really trying to overcome their emotional defects or only doing lip service until the spouse backs off.

2. *Intimacy Anorexia: The Workbook*. This workbook is for the anorexic who withholds affection. It helps keep him or her accountable and offers real hope for becoming the loving wife or husband God wants his people to be. People who work with others need this workbook so they can recommend it for people they counsel.

3. *Married & Alone* by Douglas Weiss, Ph.D. This book was published three years after *Intimacy Anorexia*. It is different in that all the stories are those of the emotionally neglected and abused spouse. It validates their pain. I found the first book more enlightening because it quotes the anorexics along with the mistreated spouses, so I got both sides. But this book is valuable for people who are just beginning to deal with the pain of their marriage as their eyes are opening to the deceit and manipulation of their unloving mates.

4. *Married & Alone: Healing Exercises for Spouses*. Marriage to an intimacy anorexic is psychologically damaging to the mistreated spouse. Anyone married to an anorexic for any length of time has issues of his or her own to work through. This workbook guides a person through understanding their marriage and working through the problems. It helps a person analyze the state of his or her marriage and determine if the mate is genuinely trying to build a healthy relationship. One beneficial exercise is called "Bait and Switch." It asks you to list promises your mate made during courtship only to do something different in marriage. Nearly every person who has confided to me about being in an unloving marriage has shared such stories.

5. *Challenges in Marriage: What to Do When Sin Inhibits Love* MP3 by Patsy Rae Dawson. This series of classes taught Stacey how to hold her husband Joe accountable for his sin of sexually neglecting her. It will teach you how to keep the discussions on topic. A major problem with some anorexics is their temper. You'll learn how to face anger and teach the anorexic how to fight fair.

6. *Beyond the Bedroom, Healing for Adult Children of Sex Addicts* by Dr. Douglas Weiss. Both the Shulammitte and the Shepherd grew up in loving homes. As a result, they were prepared to give and receive love. One of Solomon's brothers killed another brother who raped his sister. Solomon killed an older brother to defend his throne. While Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived with book knowledge, he was incredibly stupid in his love life. Children are greatly affected by their parents' inability to love each other and carry scars into their adult lives. Dr. Weiss grew up in such a home and became a sexual addict. This book helps adult children of intimacy anorexics move past their upbringing so they can enjoy a wonderful love life.