



Does Marriage Counseling Help?

What's the Best Next Step for Your Struggling Marriage?

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“The difference between stumbling blocks and stepping stones is how you use them.”

Unknown

Introduction:

Does Marriage Counseling Help?

When I was making the incredibly difficult decision about whether or not to leave my first marriage, I sought help where most of us seek help: with a marriage counselor. After all, there were problems in my marriage, clearly, if I was considering leaving. I thought, why not go to the marriage counselor? It can't hurt, and maybe it will even help.

The counselor was a great guy. He was a former minister, but he had no agenda for saving the marriage because it was the “right thing to do” according to his faith. He was able to help us both understand how we had gotten to this place in our marriage, where things began crumbling around us and we were living as complete strangers.

But that's where it ended.

He could not help us each individually heal what had brought us to this place. He wasn't able to help us heal the marriage or move forward. I decided to leave my marriage and although it felt good to have a safe place to melt down once a week during that difficult time, after a while, those visits made me realize I had stopped making forward progress personally.

I had stopped making forward progress personally.

My experience is certainly not everyone's experience. But, I have enough women reach out to me saying they've tried everything including multiple marriage counselors or therapists for months or even years, with no success. They're trying to figure out why they're so unhappy in their marriages, whether or not their marriages can be fixed and if they even want to keep trying. Their decisions have wide-sweeping ramifications, impacting children, family and friendships. Their decisions will impact literally every single day of their lives going forward. And the one thing they're afraid to do is make the wrong decision, a decision they'll regret for years to come.

Does Marriage Counseling Help?

I know we've come to believe that if the marriage between two people is broken, then it takes both people actively working on it to make it better. I'm going to show you why that's not necessarily true.

I know we've come to believe that turning to marriage counseling is the answer, but if marriage counseling was truly effective, then why are so many couples still struggling in their marriages?

Would our divorce rate still be up to 50% of first marriages and up to 76% in multiple marriages if marriage counseling really helped?

If it was that easy and since so many people have tried it over the last several decades, would we still be struggling?

I believe that the marriage counseling model is outdated and the way that it approaches our relationship issues feels more like a band-aid than a healing of the root cause of the troubles in our most important and most intimate relationships.

I'm going to challenge a lot of long-held theories in this ebook, and you may not agree with all of them. *That's okay.*

You're obviously struggling in your marriage and considering counseling or couples therapy if you've downloaded this piece and I want you to have as much helpful information as possible so that you can make the best decision for yourself, your heart and your marriage.

I believe the marriage counseling model is outdated.



Chapter One: Which Way Are You Headed?

*“What lies behind you and what lies in front of you, pales
in comparison to what lives inside of you.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

One of the things that therapy and counseling are remarkably good at is looking back at our pasts to help us identify how we got to where we are. It will pull in all the inner child traumas that we thought were long since behind us. It will look deeply into our relationship with our parents to understand why we have the painful patterns playing out over and over again in our lives. It may even be able to provide you with a name or label that helps you make sense of how you got to this place in your life, such as codependent, empathic, depressed, or anxious.

Looking back can be helpful. After all, you cannot change what you're not willing to look at. But there's a reason why the rear-view mirror in your car is so small and the front windshield is so large. You want to see what's behind you, but by comparison, it's infinitely more important to be looking ahead to where you're going.

In my coaching practice, what I most want to understand is where my clients are currently and where it is they want to be. Together we uncover what obstacles are getting in the way and admittedly, some of those obstacles may be patterns, fears and beliefs from your past that continue to hold you back today. Then my role is to help my clients build a bridge to get them to the outcome they desire for themselves and overcome the obstacles along the way.

That may be having a healthy, loving marriage...

Their desired outcome may be understanding how to leave their marriage and do so in the most peaceful way possible...

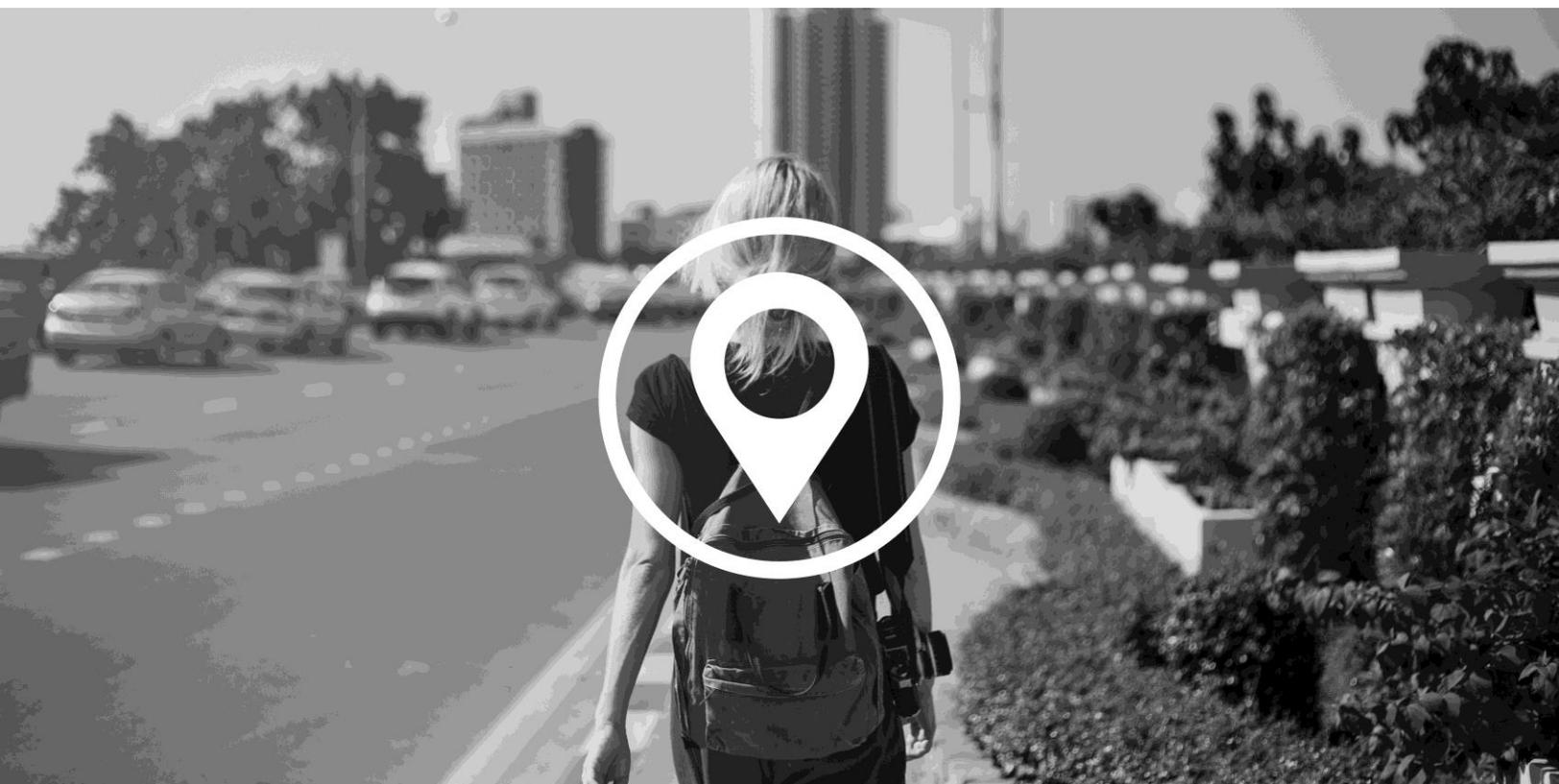
That destination may be feeling empowered and equipped in their marriage to weather the storms...

Every client gets to want what they want; there is no right or wrong answer. But the conversation should be 10% about where you've been and 90% about where you're going; not the other way around...otherwise you might feel a little better, or even a little justified, but you won't ever reach your destination.

Everyone gets to want what they want; there is no right or wrong answer.

Sticking with the car metaphor: We set the GPS in our cars by putting in the address of the destination we want to reach. The GPS knows where you are now and identifies the most direct path to getting you to where you want to go. It doesn't ask you, *How did you get here?* or *Where have you been?* It just keeps directing you toward your destination and when you get off the path, it is obsessive about getting you back on your most direct path to your destination.

So when considering the best approach for you and your marriage, it's worth considering which approach will get you to your destination more quickly...looking backwards or focusing forward.



Chapter Two: How Fast Do You Want to Get to Where You Are Going?

“If you are not making the progress that you would like to make and are capable of making, it is simply because your goals are not clearly defined.” Paul J Meyer

When you begin therapy, you should expect to spend several months uncovering the details in your past as the therapist gets to know you. Your regular ongoing sessions become more of an exploration talking about where you are today and what’s not working for you. That process can take years.

This gentle unfolding is really important when someone is in despair or deep depression. The person who is curled up in the fetal position is not equipped to jump up and run a race to some destination they think they want. Pushing them to do so could do more harm than good, so this person would be a better fit for therapy than coaching. That’s why there truly is an ideal client for each different approach.

But not everyone is in despair or sitting in deep depression.

It's been my experience that couples in heartache and struggle wait a long time before they truly seek help. And during that time, things between the spouses don't magically get better, they actually become worse. So, by the time they take the steps to seek assistance getting out of the pain, they're in the danger zone as a couple and they need relief quickly.

Unfortunately, many couples wait until their relationship has deteriorated significantly and because they don't feel any relief after the first few sessions of marriage counseling or couples therapy, they decide it's not helpful and they stop going.

This only causes the relationship to continue its slow, painful death and the individuals in the relationship to feel increasingly hopeless. But the problem is that they're looking to a long-term process to provide an immediate fix and therapy simply doesn't work that way.

Don't look for a long-term process to provide you with an immediate fix.

Alternatively, there is the option to get incredibly focused on where you're going so that you can get there quicker. With my clients, we spend one session getting the background of where you've been and what's not working. One session. Sometimes that session lasts two hours, but more often than not, it's about 90 minutes.

Then we get to work on where we're going and create the most direct route to the destination. And we reach the destination in 8-10 weeks.

Weeks, instead of years.

Not everyone needs to get where they're going quickly. Some really can and prefer to let it be an exploration and unfold slowly.

Not everyone needs to feel relief quickly. Some really can and prefer to walk through the pain slowly so they can feel confident that no stone is left unturned.

There truly is a right fit for each person's needs and it's just a choice.

Not everyone needs to
get where they're
going quickly.



Chapter Three:

Two Halves Do Not Always Make a Whole

“If your love for another person doesn’t include loving yourself, then your love is incomplete..”

Shannon L. Alder

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

I could also argue...not only is it a slower approach, but it’s also less effective.

In every relationship, there are three distinct entities:

1. You, as an individual,
2. Your spouse as an individual,
3. The relationship as its own unique entity (being comprised from the two distinct individuals).

Other People Don't Belong in Your Marriage

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

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

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

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

Your relationship with your partner has only two pieces: You and your partner. That's it. And the issues that arise are between the two of you, not anyone else. Within your relationship, a lot of private things get shared...hopes and dreams, fears and insecurities, desires and needs, hurts and heartaches.

I know sometimes we are led to believe that once we get married, we are no longer individuals, but rather half of a different whole. I've seen far too many wedding ceremonies where each person is holding a lit candle, they each bring their flames together to light the unity candle and then symbolically (and sadly) blow out their own candle.

That entity you created is important, but it does not negate you as an individual.

In marriage counseling or couples therapy, what you should expect to spend most of your time is on the relationship itself, such as how you communicate with one another, how well you listen when the other is speaking, and how you argue or react to the other. All of this can be helpful, for sure.

In individual coaching, you're going to focus upon the individual, helping him or her become stronger mentally and healthier emotionally – which is the only thing you have any control over and your only ability to influence the relationship. It will focus on equipping the individual with tools to help them improve their relationship with themselves and their spouses. Because in relationships, two ill-equipped halves do not make a whole.

As a matter of fact:

Your relationship together will only ever be as strong as the weakest one of you.

It will only be as healthy as the least emotionally healthy one of you.

That's why **our individual work**, our mental and emotional well-being and how well we're equipped, is so important to the health of our relationships. We are 50% of what makes-up the relationship and if we're not mentally and emotionally healthy, then we're the ones holding the relationship back and contributing to the pain being created and perpetuated.

If we're not mentally and emotionally healthy ourselves, then we're the ones holding the relationship back and contributing to the pain.

When One is Ready and the Other Is Not...

Many times, the two people in the relationship aren't ready to do that level of work at the same time, so one person wants to go to marriage counseling and the other doesn't. And because one won't work on it until the other is ready...

No one actively seeks help...

Nothing gets done...

No one moves forward...

The same old patterns keep repeating inside the relationship...

And the marriage continues to become more and more disconnected....

Until eventually it's too far gone for anyone to fix.

Chapter Four:

Do You Want a Band-Aid or a Cure?

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

Galileo Galilei

Many of my clients who are struggling in their marriages attend marriage counseling with their spouses, in addition to working with me. They share with me the context of their conversations and progress (or lack thereof) as a result of those sessions. And I fear that through those conversations, we're not getting at the heart of the matter and approaching the problems strategically.

My client Abbey goes to marriage counseling with her husband twice each week, where they discuss what's not working in the relationship – mostly from Abbey's perspective, since she's the one that is unhappy.

She doesn't feel at home in her own home, so the counselor and her husband suggest she go buy some little items to put in the home so that it better represents her style and tastes. But that's not the real problem...

She shares that she doesn't feel heard and so the counselor is teaching her husband better listening skills. But his ability to listen isn't the real issue...

It's time to start taking the conversation deeper.

She shares that she feels empty and alone in the relationship, not having been touched in months and not felt truly held in years. And like clockwork, the counselor suggests the scheduled weekly date night. But the two of them not going on dates is also not the problem...

Abbey is supposed to supply the reasons for why she's unhappy and unfulfilled in her marriage, and the marriage counselor provides suggestions for each of those reasons for her husband to react to, resolve or fix.

She's trying to share how she feels.....the symptoms of an ill marriage.

The counselor is tactically treating the symptoms by applying band-aids and handing out aspirins for the victim lying there bleeding from a gunshot wound.

But no one's talking about the gunshot wound. No one's taking the bullet out, fixing the organs damaged inside and stitching up the wound. No one's dealing with the root cause of the problem, so the symptoms remain.

It's time to start taking the conversation deeper.

Where was Abbey physically and emotionally when the bullet hit her? How long has she been bleeding? Has the bleeding led to other issues that now have to be dealt with? And outside of no longer bleeding...how is it that she wants to feel in her most important and most intimate relationship?

Abbey wants to feel adventurous in her life and full of possibilities.

She wants a relationship that isn't just fine; she wants it to be extraordinary.

She wants to look forward to seeing him and even feel butterflies again once in a while. When she lays her head down on her pillow at night next to her Beloved, she wants to feel warm, calm and peaceful. She wants to feel that there's no place else she's rather be.

And she doesn't – and frankly never has – felt any of those things in her relationship with her husband.

Regardless of which approach you choose to seek help in your struggling marriage, it's important to understand the root cause and focus on curing that, not just sticking band-aids on it.

It's important to think strategically, rather than tactically about how to solve the problems.

And it's important to stop talking so much about the day-to-day irritants and begin identifying how you feel today in your marriage and how you want to feel in the future.

Chapter Five: Does Telling Your Story Help You or Hurt You?

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

Albert Einstein

When we’re struggling in our marriages, it’s natural to go looking for answers and talking to others about it. We talk to our friends, our families, even our therapists about the problems we’re facing.

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. We share all the issues and frustrations. We share what’s not working. We want support for how we’re feeling and justification for our actions and responses.

But all that talking isn’t helping us...

Talk therapy can help to identify where we're at and what's not working in our marriages. However, once we've identified what we're working with, continuing to talk about it can do more harm than good by keeping us stuck in the problem, rather than moving towards the solution.

Plus, when we're stuck in that same story, we can't create a new story or a different experience.

We can't create a new experience in our relationship when we're constantly focused upon how it is now or how it has been in the past.

So it's time to start telling a new story, rather than re-telling the same old one that brought you here.

It's time to start focusing on how you want it to be, rather than how it is.

It's time to move out of the problem and into a solution – one that you can live with without regret or second-guessing.

When we're stuck in the same story,
we can't create a new story.



Conclusion:

Do You Want Your Answer or Someone Else's Answer?

“If your life is cloudy and your life is far, far off course, you may have to go on faith for awhile, but eventually you’ll learn that every time you trust your internal navigation system, you end up closer to your right life..”

Martha Beck

I was just interviewed on a podcast where a woman was sharing her story about going through her divorce. She said she was recently at a conference where another woman – a woman she had just met – told her about the troubles in her own marriage and then asked her, “Do you think I should leave my marriage?”

Thankfully, this woman knew enough to tell this other woman that she, of course, could not possibly give her that answer.

We cannot get *our answer* for *our hearts*, *our marriages* and *our lives* from someone else.

You can't get it from a random woman at a conference.

You cannot get it from a psychic.

You cannot get it from your mother, your best friend, or your therapist. Even the people who care about you most cannot give you your answer.

Here's why:

Each of us has a set of life experiences, preferences and beliefs that we carry to help guide and direct our lives. And no two people have the exact same set of life experiences, preferences and beliefs – not even family have the same inputs.

So, when someone tells you what to do, they're telling you what they would do if they were in your shoes. But they're not in your exact situation and this is yours to do.

When someone – anyone – tells you what to do, they're telling you what they would do.

It's incredibly important that if you choose to stay in your marriage that you do so without regret. And should you make the incredibly difficult choice to leave your marriage, you do so and never second-guess your decision. That's how, no matter what your decision, you are able to move forward in a healthy way.

There's something you should know about me and my coaching style...

I don't tell my clients what to do.

First of all, because it doesn't work. Imagine I told you, "Yea, your husband's a jerk; you should leave him." Does that help you? Does that give you an answer that you can live with for the rest of your life? Does that give you both clarity and certainty?

Of course not.

But secondly, if I tell you what I think you should do, I'm telling you how I would live your life. But how I would live your life and how you would live your life would likely be very different.

No one can give you *your* answer for *your* life.

Here's what I will do:

I will guide you to your answer.

I will help you to see the truth of what's happening in your experience.

I will help you understand what you really want in your most intimate relationship and how you want to feel in your marriage.

I will help you know for sure whether or not what you want is possible in your marriage.

I will take you by the hand and walk alongside you through your fears.

And I will do it in with great love, admiration and respect for the journey.

No one can give you your answer for your life. But you certainly can lock arms with someone who has a GPS through the questions and a map to your answers.

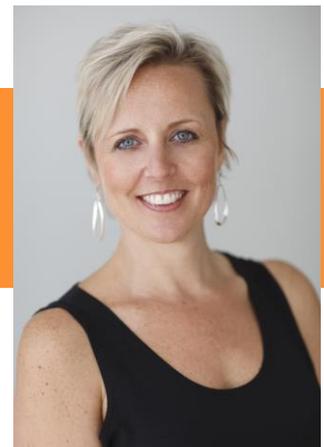
If you're ready for that level of clarity and real transformation in your marriage, then I invite you to [complete an online application](#) to potentially receive a complimentary Truth & Clarity session with either myself or a member of my team.

During that call, we will:

- Understand what's not working in your marriage
- What you've been doing to overcome the challenges in your marriage and why it hasn't been working
- Put together a plan that will guide you through your next steps

This may just be the most valuable 45 minutes you've spent on your marriage in a long time.

Apply for your [complimentary Truth & Clarity session](#) now.



One Thing is Clear...

How you and your partner engage with one another is what got you to this place in your relationship. And you've likely tried everything you know how to do yourselves to make it better.

So, you clearly need help.

You clearly need new insights and tools.

Does marriage counseling help? It likely won't hurt you, and it's certainly better than doing nothing.

I simply think we can do better.



“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 is no longer a mistake. If you remain stuck, you learn nothing.”
Eckhart Tolle

Who I Am.



Hello, my name is Sharon Pope.

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

My international best-selling book, [Soulful Truth Telling: Am I in the Wrong Marriage](#) helps women move from stuck in indecision to relationship clarity.

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

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

SHARON POPE

MASTER LIFE COACH & BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

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