

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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Why have the feelings of love disappeared in your marriage?

One of the most common things I hear in marriage counseling is, "I just don't have any feelings of love for my spouse. I don't feel anything toward him or her. What should I do?" Individuals ask these questions because they want to know how this could have happened in their marriage. They remember how they started out with such an exuberance and passionate love toward their spouse, but a change has occurred and it scares them. More importantly, when couples ask these questions they want to know if this problem can be fixed? The simple answer to this question is yes!

How do you fix a loveless marriage? Can the feelings of love return to the way they used to be? What are the steps to take if you want to make this a reality?

Understand why the feelings of love disappear.

First, you must understand that in every marriage the specific details are different, but the basic causes are always the same. The best way to reason through why this has happened is to allow me to give you a simple analogy.

Have you ever had a good friend that today you are estranged from? If you say yes, how did this happen? What destroyed that friendship? What turned the feelings of friendship sour? There are some very specific things that happened that destroyed this relationship. The specific details are different for each of you reading this, but the general causes are always the

same. Was it some specific sin that occurred between the two of you that caused a lack of trust? Or perhaps it was some gossip by you or them, or a betrayal of some sort. Was it some selfish behavior that offended you? Were there possibly some harsh words that were exchanged between the two of you? After these sinful actions occurred, there was possibly an attempt to reconcile the issues, but one or both of you refused repentance and forgiveness. The result was that the relationship went from being sweet to sour. You went from having a good friend to being completely estranged, to possibly even becoming enemies.



You can mend your broken relationship!

This is exactly what happens in marriages every day. Marriages move from great feelings of love, to distance, disillusionment, and sometimes divorce. But this doesn't have to happen with a friendship or a marriage, if the partners will simply resolve the issues between them. But when these issues are not reconciled, the results are that two people will constantly be thinking about the wrong that has occurred. This only produces more sinful behavior and distance, and the disillusionment grows. The loss of the feelings of love, and the hardness of a person's

heart, will always result in more unloving behavior, unloving words, and unloving responses. The result is the feelings of love evaporate.

Where do feelings come from?

Another very important truth that must be understood is where feelings come from in the first place. Feelings result from two basic sources, your thinking, and your behavior. Therefore, thoughts, feelings, and behavior are intricately connected. You cannot separate them from one another. The way you think will control how you feel, and ultimately how you behave. How you behave will also directly control how you feel. Let me show you this in the Scripture.

In Mark 14:66-72, as the Apostle Peter was in the middle of denying Jesus, scripture records: *"Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus of Nazareth.' But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you are saying.' And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, 'This is one of them.' But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, 'Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it.' Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know this Man of whom you speak!' A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.' And when*

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

he thought about it, he wept.” Notice what happened after Peter denied Jesus. *He called to mind* the words that Jesus had spoken when He predicted his denial. He *thought about it* and he began to weep. Do you see in this passage how Peter’s emotional state and feelings were directly connected to what he thought about? Your feelings and emotions are also directly connected to what you think about. As you dwell in your mind on anything, you will be affected emotionally by these thoughts.

Another biblical example of how your feelings are directly connected to what you think is revealed by Jeremiah the prophet. Jeremiah wrote about what was going on in his mind in the midst of a very stressful time in his life. In the following verses Jeremiah is very upset after the destruction of his beloved city, Jerusalem. He prayed to the Lord: *“Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall. My soul still remembers and sinks within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the LORD’S mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I hope in Him!’”* (Lam. 3:19-24). As Jeremiah remembered the severe affliction of his people his feelings and emotions sunk within him. In other words, he felt very depressed. But, notice what he chose to do instead of dwelling on these sad and terrible events. He recalled to his mind God’s mercies and compassions, and these thoughts gave him hope. He made a simple decision not to dwell on his trials, but rather chose to dwell on God’s promises, and immediately he was emotionally uplifted and feelings of hope flooded his soul.

Consider how your thinking is also directly connected to your behavior. Paul the apostle explained this connection when he taught the Philippian church: *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true,*

whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:8-9). Notice that Paul believed that if you would meditate or think on the right things then the God of peace would be with you. To meditate means to consciously choose to think about something. Then Paul said the things you have thought about you should *do*. In other words, you cannot just choose to think about the right things, you must also *do* the right things! Jesus agreed with this truth when He taught His disciples, *“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them”* (John 13:17). The word *blessed* in this verse means to be happy. In other words, Jesus taught that doing the correct behavior is the only way to become emotionally happy, or have the feelings of happiness.

Therefore, if you are harboring thoughts of resentment toward your spouse you cannot have feelings of love or experience real happiness. Why? Because holding resentment is sinful. If you are behaving selfishly or speaking harshly to your spouse, then you cannot ever expect to experience the feelings of love toward them because this is also sin.

What can be done to regain the feelings of love?

1. Renew your relationship before God so you can find the power of His love. You must begin here. Why is your relationship with God so important to regaining the feelings of love in your marriage? I can guarantee you that if you are distant or estranged from your spouse, you are probably harboring sinful thoughts of resentment and unforgiveness, which means you are not right with God. You are probably also behaving in unloving ways,

which means that you are not right with God. The Apostle John said it this way, *“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”* (1 John 4:20).

Another reason to have your relationship renewed before God is that you then have access to the power of His love to motivate you to godly behavior. Godly behavior will then change the way you think, and also change the way you feel. Your relationship with the Lord is critical to making any change in your marital relationship.

2. Determine your fault in the marriage. Once you have renewed your own personal relationship with the Lord, now ask God to search your heart and reveal to you exactly where you have contributed to the downward trend in your marriage. How have you lived selfishly, failed to walk in love, not put in the effort to demonstrate your affection, or just taken the relationship for granted? This will require a brutal honesty with yourself, and serious self-examination. This is exactly what Jesus said you should do. When Jesus taught His disciples how to resolve issues in their relationships He said, *“Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”* (Matt. 7:5).

Why does Jesus begin this command with the word *hypocrite*? Because He knows the hypocrisy of men’s hearts to always point the finger at someone else for the problems they experience. Rather you should first look at your own thoughts, attitudes and actions, and I’m sure you will find plenty of ways where you have failed in the relationship and have chosen to live selfishly.

3. Personally acknowledge your fault and ask forgiveness. Once you know what your faults are that have destroyed the love between you and your spouse, go and confess and

acknowledge these specific failures to your mate. When you take this action first, you are demonstrating humility and honesty with your spouse. You are declaring that you know that you have fault in this problem. At this point real reconciliation is possible between you. This is exactly what the Bible tells you to do. James commanded you to, *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (James 5:16). After you have made your confession, ask your mate to pray with you and to invite God into your marriage to help you both change. What happens if your spouse refuses to forgive, or refuses to acknowledge his or her own fault, or is unwilling to pray with you?

4. You need patience, love, and forgiveness. A harsh or negative response to your confession of fault is sometimes the response. You have to be prepared that this might be the response. It reveals your mate has a very hard heart. He or she is much more resentful than you thought. This hardness is also the reason the two of you have drifted apart and the feelings of love have disappeared. But what can be done at this point?

Consider how God deals with those who resist Him. Does He give up immediately? No! Does He say, “Well then forget you!” No! He patiently pursues those who resist Him. James encourages God’s people as they wait for the Lord’s return, *“Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain”* (James 5:7). So, if God is patiently waiting for men to respond to Him, so must you be patient and wait for your spouse to soften their heart. Patience is the loving thing to do (1 Cor. 13:4).

Another thing you must do is to forgive his or her unresponsiveness. You can’t change someone else’s heart, but you can keep your own heart right before God. Jesus said,

“Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mark 11:25-26). Forgiveness is not an optional decision. Forgiveness is a command that you must exercise with *anything* and with *anyone* who offends you.

My encouragement would be to forgive your mate’s hardness of heart, and lovingly encourage your spouse to forgive you. This is essential if you want the feelings of love to return. If you would like to read more about overcoming unforgiveness, I would encourage you to read chapter eight in my book, *Winning Your Personal Battles* which is devoted to this topic of unforgiveness.

5. Both husband and wife must be willing to take appropriate action.

Next, determine what changes need to be made in your relationship and take the appropriate action. Remember, love is not just a noun; it is also a verb, which means that love requires action. You must reconcile what has killed the love between you, but if that is all you do, then you will soon only repeat the same behavior. You must also change your behavior if you want the feelings of love to be renewed. Jesus said it this way when He spoke to the Ephesian church about their lack of love toward Him. Jesus warned them, *“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent”* (Rev. 2:4-5). Jesus made it clear to the Ephesian church that to renew their relationship with Him, they had to do their first works again. There are works that need to be stopped if you want healing in your relationship, and there are works that need to be returned to if you want the love to continue. Don’t you want the passionate feelings of love you had at the beginning of your marriage? Turn

from your sinful actions and your sinful inactions, and return to loving behavior toward your mate.

Practically this would mean that, if you have not been communicating in a loving way with your spouse, then you should start taking time to sit and talk with a kind and caring tone. If you have been taking your spouse for granted, realize that you are required to practically do the things that will enable your love to grow. In the last chapter of my book *Married and How To Stay That Way* I talk about how the Bible describes love like a fire. This is a perfect analogy relating to marriage. If you sit and do nothing to a fire, the flame will eventually go out. If you don’t want the fire to go out, then you must take action to feed the fire with more fuel. This is exactly what you must do with your marriage. Take the actions that feed the passion of your love, and the feelings of love will return.

6. Decide on some creative solutions so the same issues are not allowed to take root again.

Not every conflict that is possible in a marriage is discussed in the Bible. However, the causes of every conflict are addressed in Scripture. God’s Word addresses these causes of selfishness, pride, partiality, unwillingness to compromise, harsh and disrespectful communication, and a divided heart. Finding creative solutions are really easy when you understand and deal with the root causes in your heart. Jesus said, *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies”* (Matt. 15:19).

If you want to find these creative solutions, just ask yourself these simple questions. What is the loving thing to do in this situation? How can I be more giving when this happens? How can I meet my spouse half-way in this compromise? What can I say, and how can I say this in a loving way? How can I be honest when I talk about this issue? Remember, loving words and actions toward your spouse will nine times out of ten bring loving responses from your spouse. This is

where the feelings of love blossom and grow.

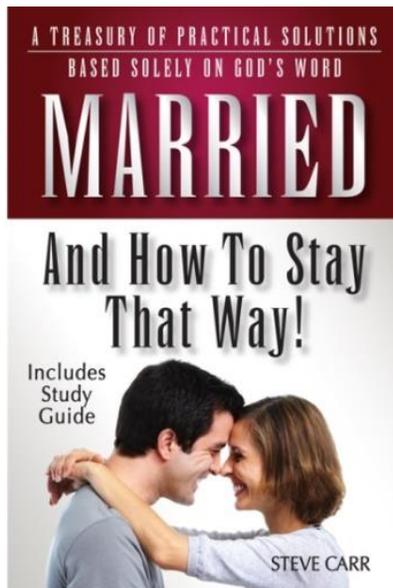
7. Reexamine every aspect of your relationship. There are seven basic areas in a marital relationship that must be examined. These basic areas in your marriage are your spiritual, mental, emotional, recreational, communicative, parental, and your sexual relationship. Are you satisfied in each of these areas of your marriage? If you are, then your marriage should be flourishing with generous feelings of love. If you are not satisfied in one or more of these areas, then this is where you need to sit down with your spouse and talk through some creative solutions. I would also suggest going to my YouTube channel and watching "Loving Your Spouse" with your mate. You can find this study at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyE6wKtiwvk> if you are interested.

The important thing for you to do is to go through every aspect of your relationship together and determine how you can do your first works over again. How can you have a closer and more intimate spiritual life together? How can there be more communication of ideas concerning the things that are important to you? What can you do to become more emotionally connected? Where can you recreate together more? How can you communicate better? What can you do to share your parental responsibilities more equitably? How can you have a more passionate sexual relationship? When you answer these questions and come up with practical solutions, and then actually do these things, the feelings of love will flood your relationship again! May God's Spirit direct your path so that you can truly love one another again!

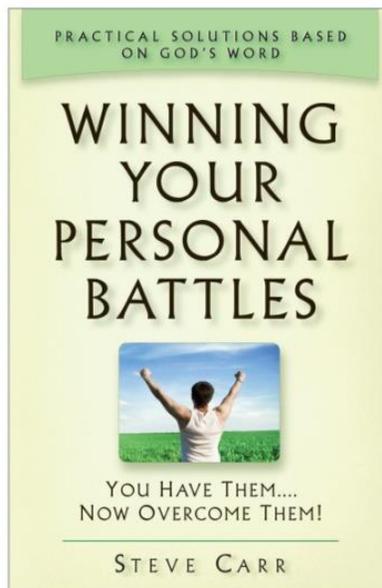
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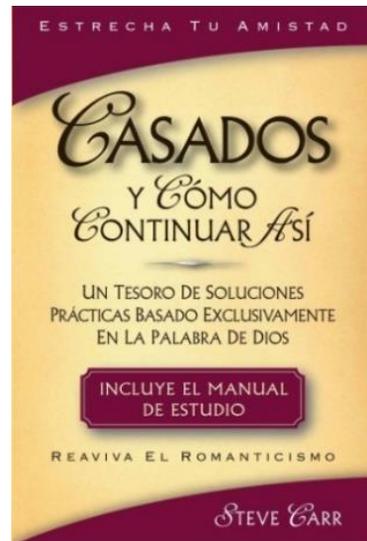
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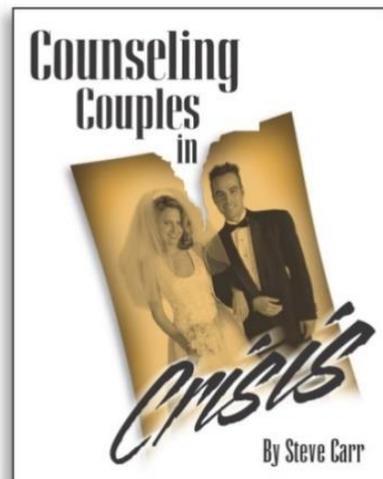
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