



## RECOVERING THE HEART OF MARRIAGE

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Having counseled couples for over 16 years, I know there are seasons where couples lose the heart of marriage. The demands on us seem to never stop whether it's our kids, work, church, family, finances, or just life. Marriages are work and keeping the heart in marriage can be difficult in a world that just keeps speeding up.

The prophet Malachi wrote a love letter to the Israelites. Some of you who have read the book of Malachi might be saying to yourself, "that was a love letter?" Sometimes love calls us to say some really difficult things. Malachi does just that (Malachi 2:14) as he admonishes the Israelites because they had *broken faith with the wife of their youth*. He then speaks redemptive words from God which allow for recovery from the waywardness in which the Israelites had found themselves. Malachi writes, *Return to me, and I will return to you* (Malachi 3:7). If you find yourself far from your spouse emotionally, spiritually or physically, do as Malachi told the Israelites: *return to your first love*—your relationship with Jesus Christ.

As a counselor I often talk about giving a couple a *skill set* to better communicate or to better connect in their relationship with each other. This is not difficult because there is so much good information on marital enrichment. What is more difficult is working with a couple's *will set* which is much like Malachi working with the Israelites. When couples are able to *mutually submit* to one another (Ephesians 5:22) and ultimately submit their wills to God, they can recover the heart of their marital relationship.

Counselors must always address a couple's *will set* before giving them the *skill set* to better their marriage. Otherwise, the knowledge you impart to the couple is used against one another down the road. For example, they say things like, "Don't you remember what our counselor told us?" or "You didn't say that correctly like we learned in counseling; therefore, I'm not listening to anything you have to say!". This is why reading a good marriage book or going to a marriage enrichment weekend often does not work. Couples cannot build *skill sets* without doing a personal inventory of their wills (or hearts).

### Recovering a Couple's Heart in Marriage through Rebuilding the Will Set of a Couple

1. **Commit to Intimacy**--David Burns, Professor and researcher at Stanford University defines intimacy as *one's willingness to end the negative feelings you have for someone when you get close to him or her*.
2. **Commit to Staying in the Relationship and Changing-** Challenge a couple to change the only thing they can change which is themselves, not their spouse.
3. **Commit to Giving Up What We All Like—Blame!** Blame always gives a person a reason to do something they normally would not do. An example of this would be a spouse who says, "I cannot change my bad spending habits until you start being nice to me."
4. **Commit to Return to Your First Love**—ultimately, only God can transform and renew a heart. All couples have to ask if they have forsaken their first love (Jesus Christ). If so, invite them to follow Malachi's direction to return to Him and He will return to them to bring healing to the heart of their marriage.

At Carmel Counseling Center, we believe that God has promised to meet every need (Philippians 4:19, II Peter 1:3). We also believe that God often uses other people to meet these needs through direct intervention in the lives of those who are facing life's struggles.

To refer someone to our counseling center, or schedule an appointment, contact Gina Meinders, our Intake Assessment Coordinator at 704.849.0686.

[www.carmelcounselingcenter.org](http://www.carmelcounselingcenter.org)



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