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Do This to Save Your Marriage

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I'm not sure what's going on but lately it seems more of my friends are either getting a divorce or thinking about it. I realize there is no single cure for a failing marriage but as I look back on my almost forty years of marriage I recall an early lesson that helped Cindy and me cut off relational problems before they got too big to control. We had only been married a year or so when we identified what I labeled the "I don't want to feeling."

It's what we felt when the selfishness monster pleaded with us to disregard the other person. Of course, recognizing the presence of the creature doesn't mean he'll graciously leave, especially in areas where he's established control. But he can be bridled, led to a cage, and deprived of the freedom to roam around our hearts destroying our marriage. Here's how.

Step One — Admit the Depth of the Problem

Step One: Seriously Admit the Depth of the Problem This likely won't happen until after you ask God to show you the evil of your self-centeredness. It's easy to tip our hat to problems as though such recognition will wave them away.

Raw Sewage in the Yard

Several years ago I noticed an elevated walkway that led from one of our decks to the yard had shifted. A friend mentioned that one of the pilings on which a support beam rested could be sinking. He suggested I check it out.

I agreed something seemed amiss, but it didn't appear worthy of a closer look. After all, trees shrouded the walkway and getting to the source of the problem would be a hassle. A few months later, I climbed under the walkway and found raw sewage dumping into our yard. Moles had dug holes under the pilings causing them to sink and break the plastic sewage line that ran directly beneath the pilings.

Until I saw the seriousness of the problem, I wasn't willing to fix it. But I guarantee you, once I saw the flow of things, I wasted no time repairing the smelly problem.

Selfishness is like that. You may see a few misplaced boards in your marriage. Perhaps a support piling is sinking. Not a problem, you think. Until you realize selfishness is a broken sewage pipe dumping waste all over your marriage, you'll make little effort to deal with it.

Ask God to show you the seriousness of the problem. Pray he'll show you how much of what you do is driven by a desire to be served. Ask him to let you see how frequently your anger is triggered by selfish desires that are denied. As you do this, you'll be ready to take the next step.

Step Two — Seek Forgiveness

Step Two: Seek Forgiveness Once we see the seriousness of our selfishness, how it displeases God and hurts our spouse, we'll understand how desperately we need forgiveness. I think we'll feel like the prophet Isaiah who upon seeing the holiness of God said, ""Woe to me!" I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty'" (Isaiah 6:5).

Fortunately, God never withholds forgiveness from a broken person who turns to him. In the case of Isaiah, an angel flew to him with a live coal in his hand. In Isaiah 6:7 we read, "With it he touched my mouth and said, "'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for'."

God's forgiveness cuts the cords of shame that hang like a weight to our soul. It frees us to ask our spouse to forgive our selfishness. On several occasions my selfishness has driven me to treat Cindy with impatience when we were due to leave for an engagement. Later, I could have said to her, "Please forgive my impatience." I had been impatient. But it would have been better to have said, "Please forgive my selfishness. I put my desire to leave on time above your feelings. I'm sorry."

The Words That Stick

Such words often stick to the roof of the mouth. Our selfishness and pride demand that we defend ourselves, prove we were right, and wait for an apology from our spouse. The "I don't want to feeling" begs us to stand our ground. That's why, after taking the first two steps we must take the third. Next week, we'll examine the final step we must take in overcoming the "I don't want to feeling."