

Dear Marriage Counseling Clients,

It is important from the start that you know the goal of marriage counseling is *not* to change your partner or to change you (though both might occur). I have found that the greatest success in marriage counseling comes when each person is willing to look at their behaviors in light of the way God would have them live and make changes to live more and more in line with the way the Bible and God would have them live. The goal is *not* to help you endure an unsatisfactory marriage. **The goal is to help you *build marriage that has the oneness God intended for marriage as stated in Genesis 2:24*.** A oneness marriage will result in a more satisfying, more intimate and less conflictual marriage.

I believe the Bible has the answers to your problems and I will use the Bible in our counseling. In addition to the Bible, when and if appropriate, I will use elements from secular marriage and family therapy, but only when they do not conflict or contradict the ultimate truth of the Bible.

It is important for you to understand I cannot fix your marriage. You and your spouse are the only ones who can do that. What I will do is offer you tools, skills and insights that can contribute to helping your marriage become what God would have it be, but it is up to you and your spouse to fix your marriage. As your counselor, I can't guarantee success. I wish I could. I am like a hunting guide who contracts to lead hunters to where they are likely to find the game they desire. All the guide can do is use his or her expertise and knowledge of the terrain so that the chances for success are as high as possible.

I will give assignments to be completed prior to each session. Also, in order to see the greatest amount of success I would like you to attend Sunday services at the church of your choice that teaches and believes in the Bible. Hearing the word of God preached each Sunday will help us in the counseling process.

In addition to this **I would like you to consider attending a home Bible study, have a daily practice of time reading the Bible and in private personal prayer, and to memorize passages from the Bible.** If there is a need I may also ask you to attend a recovery/support group. Together with the time we spend in counseling I have when couples will do these things it gives us the greatest opportunity for success.

By electing to have marriage counseling, you have agreed to a period that will undoubtedly be difficult, require your finances, time and effort and, at times, be emotional. But with the risks come the opportunity to make changes that could positively affect the rest of your life.

This probably will not happen all at once. Suppose you were in Los Angeles looking toward Richmond, Virginia. Then you changed your direction by only a single degree of the 360 degrees in a full circle. With only this small-but-

fundamental change in course, instead of arriving in Richmond, you would pass north of New York City. There is a world of difference between Richmond and New York City! In the same way, I hope that counseling will help you and your spouse make small-but-fundamental changes that make a world of difference in your marriage.

Counseling takes time and hard work. **I will ask you to do things, to make changes in the way you are currently acting. It will not be easy to change. Be assured, however, that the couples who benefit the most from counseling are those who willingly do what I suggest with a genuine desire to help their marriage.**

Here are some suggestions to help you make the most of the time you spend in counseling:

1. It takes time and patience to change your current behavior to make your marriage happier. If you break your leg, a physician places your leg in a cast to allow it to heal. It is not natural to have your leg in a cast. It feels awkward, and you sometimes resent it. But you do not take off the cast. When your leg is healed, that cast is no longer necessary. In the same way, your marriage needs healing. Many of the things I ask you to do might seem unnatural, awkward or perhaps silly. You might resent following my suggestions. Some things I suggest are not meant to be permanent. But for maximum effectiveness, they should be followed at least while you are in counseling so that your marriage will have the opportunity to heal.

2. During counseling, there will be ups and downs in your relationship. Only rarely does progress quickly gained last long. Be prepared for swings in your feelings about your spouse and about the benefits of counseling.

3. Don't quit too early. You are likely to feel that you want to end counseling if you experience two or three good weeks. If you end there, you might run into problems later if conflict again erupts. Or you might want to end counseling if you can't see progress. Sometimes counseling gets "stuck," and it takes several weeks to free it. If you feel "stuck," tell me.

4. Don't expect perfection from your spouse. Assume that your spouse is trying to do what is best, but is human, just as you and I are. At times, we will all fail. Practice forgiveness instead of judgment.

5. Change first. When a marriage becomes troubled, there is a tendency to think, "I'll change when I see that he (or she) is serious about changing." The attitude is much less helpful than thinking, "I am responsible for my own behavior. I must change my negative behaviors without being concerned about what my spouse does."

6. It's worth the risk. Perhaps things have not been well with your marriage for a long time. You might think, "It's not worth the risk. Why should I try to love her (or him) one more time when it looks as if I'll just be rejected again?" You might be correct in your thinking, but if you don't take the risk – using counseling to really show your love to your spouse – then your marriage will almost surely fail.

I want you to be successful at improving your marriage. I know you both want the same success and happiness. I am looking forward to working with you in this venture.

Sincerely,
Dr. Marcial Felan, LMFT