



Eaglets Wings



BREAKING THE SILENCE, MENDING A MARRIAGE

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This article felt too personal to put my name to when it was pub-

lished last year in

. But with my lovely husband's agreement, I have decided to share it here as I believe God not only breathes new life into the ashes of a situation but can use them to help others.

According to The Marriage Foundation, only 9% of couples who spilt up have a high conflict relationship; 60% are happy and not quarrelling the year before they part. Once upon a time, I would have found that surprising but now I can believe it. My experience of marriage is that times of difficulty can follow on quickly from times of harmony.

More marriages
might survive if the
partners realized
that sometimes the
better comes after
the worse.

-Doug Larson

The year before our tenth wedding anniversary, my husband and I were happy. As we approached this milestone, I daydreamed about us retaking our vows but, in quite a short space of time, celebrations seemed like the icing on a wedding cake- a nice extra but the more important consideration became the cake itself. Cracks were appearing and we weren't sure it could cope with any adornments. More worryingly, we weren't sure it would last another decade.

As the arguments escalated, we realised we needed outside help,

something I'd assumed was for others, people with 'weak' marriages. But God started to challenge my prejudices when I came across an advertisement for Relate marriage counselling.

A fortnight later, as we waited in the Relate offices for our first session, I felt scared, convinced our decision to get help was an acknowledgement that we weren't going to make it. My thinking went something like this: first stop Relate, second stop divorce.

I now see how nonsensical this was- why would seeking help make things worse?! With nearly every other problem we encounter, from our car to our health, we seek help but there's still a stigma and a silence about getting help with our marriages, which can compound the sense of fear and isolation that relationship problems create.

If someone had told me back then that a relationship can be brought back from the brink, if someone had normalised our decision to get help, I think it would have taken away some of that fear and isolation. If someone had told me that tackling relationship problems head on can actually make the relationship better than it was before the problems crept in, I might have taken heart. It's partly for that reason that I want to share our experience.

Hitting the Bottom

We were accessing the 6 free sessions available to any military marriage that has hit tough times. I wondered how much progress we could really make in the sessions on offer. Our problems seemed infi-

nite, the help finite, and yet, astonishingly, by the final session, we had addressed the main issues and reconciled.

The therapist explained that for many couples, and this seemed true of us, one or two contentious issues can swamp the entire relationship and make it feel as though the whole thing has soured. By putting those issues in their proper place, we could see all the good stuff again.

Relate wasn't a once-for-all solution. Six months later we found ourselves in a similar situation but this time we had more strategies at our disposal from the teaching we'd received and we knew we could get more help if necessary- we weren't alone.

They say the first rule of war is 'Know thine enemy.' In a warring marriage, it can feel as though our spouse has become the enemy. This can be particularly true in a military marriage like ours, with the turbulence created by uncertain work patterns and time apart, which can give rise to competing interests and separate agendas.

These things can leave us feeling so disconnected from our partner that we may even wonder whether we married the wrong person. But the good news is that the enemy is rarely our spouse. And modern research suggests (there is so much hope contained in this) that good patterns of behaviour within a relationship are actually more important than compatibility, which means there is huge scope for improving our relationships.

Last year, my husband and I decided to get equipped for the future- to tackle any 'enemies' lurking in our marriage, rather than waiting for problems to arise. I knew from reading 'The Marriage Book' by Nicky and Sila Lee that they also ran 'The Marriage Course', supported by Holy Trinity Brompton in London. Googling it, I discovered it was being run up and down the country, in churches and cafes, and around the world. But there wasn't one near us so we decided to run a course ourselves.

This might seem like a case of the blind leading the blind but running the course was simply a case of facilitating- essentially, we had to provide a meal and play 'The Marriage Course' DVD. As we were a small group, we hosted it in our home.

An essential rule of the course is that there is total privacy for each couple so when we chatted through what we'd heard, each couple used a different room. My husband and I took part in our course as we wanted to learn too.

The first session of the course involved taking stock of our marriage. I was lucky enough to chat with Nicky and Sila Lee in my quest to learn more about marriage. Nicky explained that this session is intended to reveal 'your husband or wife's deepest needs, including their emotional needs... Once we discover their needs, then we can reach out to support and help each other.'

Taking Stock!

My husband and I scored very badly when we tried to guess each other's needs. Just correcting those misconceptions was a big step forward.

The next session focused on communication. The Lees told me that one of the biggest challenges to marriage, as opposed to 21 years ago when they first started the Marriage Course, is screen time. 'Smart phones have presented couples with a challenge to their own communication when they are together,' Nicky explained.

A central piece of advice given on the course is to have 'Marriage Time', which is time spent together, ideally every week. One of the tips we were given was to start by turning off our phone. 'People can be so involved with social media,' Nicky continued, 'communicating to many, many people, that they find it harder to focus on the person in front of them, find it harder with face-to-face communication.'

The week following the communication session, a wave of love caught me off guard when I saw my husband resisting his usual habit of looking at his phone during our chats at the end of the day.

Communication is so key to the success of a marriage that we returned to it in the final session with a look at 'love languages'- that is, communicating in the way that our partner will best hear us, whether that's with time, gifts, kind acts, physical affection or loving words. We had come across this concept before but I hadn't realised my husband's love languages had changed, which was good to know as I'd been talking to him in the wrong way for several years!

I asked the Lees, who've been married 40 years, how they had built a lasting relationship. They responded 'By communicating, listening, using the love languages.' They also highlighted the need to be intentional about building a strong relationship- actively choosing to do these things rather than just hoping for the best.

The other sessions looked at how to resolve conflict and forgive, the impact of our family and the one we were all dreading because we were all British- sex (which was actually fine)!

There was an additional session for couples who have to cope with times of separation, especially military couples. It explained that time apart doesn't seem to be a risk factor for couples, even though it may feel that way. However, combat is (raising the risk of divorce from 39% to 60%), meaning support may be needed where one or both partners has experienced it.

This session also considered 'The Emotional Cycle of Deployment', which I found normalised so much of what we experience when we go through a time of separation, as well as offering useful tips for coping.

I wanted the Lees to sum up their best bit of marriage advice for me: 'I would say never give up having Marriage Time,' advised Sila, 'and be kind to your partner.'

Kindness might seem like a mediocre tool in a marriage in need of

repair but we've discovered it can be immensely powerful. The course taught us that whilst we can't change one another, we can change ourselves and that can transform the whole relationship. When we show a kindness to our partner, the response we get is likely to be positive and the dynamic between us starts to change.

If, like our daily fruit and veg target, we all aimed for 5 a day when it came to acts of kindness in our marriages, I think we'd be surprised at the outcome. Little things, maybe the sorts of things we used to do when we first got married- filling our partner's car with petrol, making their lunch when they're running late, sending an encouraging text before an important meeting or just taking the time to ask about their day when we went to download our own.

Reflecting back, I asked my husband what he found most helpful about the course. He said, 'It made me realise that our problems aren't unique. It also provided a safe place to talk things through.'

It's comforting to know other couples face similar struggles to our own, something that's obvious from the moment you start 'The Marriage Course' from the simple fact it's run as a group.

We've now come to the conclusion that we will probably always have to work on the issues we first took to Relate. There will undoubtedly be tough times again. What we've learned is that we can keep trying to improve in those tricky areas; our whole relationship needn't be at the mercy of them.

The Marriage Foundation urges couples 'to mend it, not end it'. It's easier said than done but from our experience so far, it's advice worth exploring.

If you live near us and you would be interested in doing the Marriage Course, please get in touch. Attending is not a statement that you have problems, it's a statement that you value your partner and your relationship. Many people in happy relationships attend it! And you don't need to be married to attend. We d love to run another one...

Useful Sources of Information:

[The Marriage Foundation](#) provides information on where to find a course, what the course covers and how to run a course. There are Zoom/online courses during these times of Covid- it's one thing that hasn't shut its doors.

[Relate](#) is an organisation that champions marriage in a variety of ways, from offering information and research about marriage and relationships to providing links to help couples access help.

Anyone can access this help. If you are living apart from your partner or overseas, you can have webcam counselling with a Relate counsellor, even if you and your partner are not in the same location.

Every branch of the military offers free access to marriage coun-

selling to military couples experiencing problems (and the webcam option may be available to military personnel living outside the UK). The easiest way to find out about this is to contact your Unit Welfare Representative or contact Relate directly.

This article is not intended to encourage anyone to stay in a violent relationship. If you are in an abusive relationship, the [link](#) lists various organisations that offer advice, help and support.

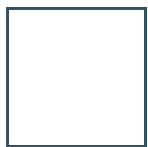


EAGLETS' WINGS

THE TATTOO PARLOUR



4 COMMENTS



Niki

REPLY

Brilliant post. Wise words and oh so true. Have already forwarded to two friends (in fact, feel like I need to send to half the people I know). So sad to hear you've had such tough times, but brilliant to know how well you're tackling them.

★ Like



krkyle78

REPLY

Thank you Niki! Think we all need to stick together- so much easier to tackle the tough stuff with support of those around us x

★ Like



Liesel

REPLY

Such a well written blog Katie, thank you for being brave and honest.

★ Like



krkyle78

REPLY

Thank you Liesel

★ Like

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