



The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope

By Leslie Vernick

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The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope By Leslie Vernick

Something Has to Change...

You can't put it into words, but something is happening to you. Your stomach churns, your heart aches, and the tension in your marriage is making you feel weary and a little crazy. The constant criticism, disrespect, cruelty, deceit, and gross indifference are eroding your confidence and breaking your spirit.

For any woman caught in an emotionally destructive marriage, Leslie Vernick offers a personalized path forward. Based on decades of counseling experience, her intensely practical, biblical advice will show you how to establish boundaries and break free from emotional abuse. Learn to:

- identify damaging behaviors
- gain the skills to respond wisely
- promote healthy change
- stay safe
- understand when, why, and even how to leave
- recognize that God sees and hates what is happening to you

Trying harder to be a perfect fantasy wife won't help fix what's wrong your marriage. Discover instead how you can initiate effective changes to stop the cycle of destruction and restore hope for the future.

"Women in an emotionally abusive marriage do not need another book on how to have a good marriage; those books rub salt in raw wounds. No, they desperately need this book so that they can diagnose just how bad their marriage is and then, with Leslie's clear expertise, develop a plan that will either begin to turn their marriage around...or give them a wise route of escape."

—Dee Brestin, author of *Idol Lies* and *The Friendships of Women*

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*

“This book is a lifeline for women who long to live a Christ-honoring life but are caught in the downward spiral of a destructive relationship. Leslie draws from a deep well of biblical insight, practical experience, and courageous advocacy to give individuals and the church the tools necessary to set captives free—one woman at a time.”

—**Joe Henseler, senior pastor of Faith Evangelical Free Church, Allentown, Pennsylvania**

“As a radio host, I regularly hear from women who feel trapped in destructive marriages. Because they hear God hates divorce, they don’t know what they can do. Leslie shows them exactly what they can do in this book. It’s packed with solid, practical, and biblical steps to get sane, get safe, and get strong.”

—**Anita Lustrea, author, speaker, and host of Moody Radio’s Midday Connection**

“Though marriage is God’s idea, many marriages are not being lived out according to God’s plan. Leslie skillfully takes the reader through specific check points, uncovering relationships that are destructive while giving valuable tools for genuine healing. This book will point many couples in the direction of change and discovery of God’s ultimate plan of mutual respect and love.”

—**Ray and Debbie Alsdorf, authors of *Beyond the Brady Bunch***

“The *Emotionally Destructive Marriage* blows the lid off the silence surrounding this serious epidemic in the church. It’s packed with the kind of solid practical wisdom and bracing straight talk women need to face reality and engage safely the crisis in their marriage. Every Christian leader should read this eyeopening corrective to damaging advice often coming from the church to women in abusive marriages. Women who are at the end of their rope will find this book to be an invaluable lifeline.”

—**Carolyn Custis James, author of *The Gospel of Ruth and Half the Church***

“This book provides answers and action for women who are caught in the vicious cycle of emotional abuse. Kudos to Leslie Vernick for addressing and exposing this prevalent problem head on and offering her wise counsel to hurting women.”

—**Suellen Roberts, founder and president of Christian Women in Media**

“The *Emotionally Destructive Marriage* is the perfect tool for pastors, counselors, and marriage leaders to help women caught in destructive marriages. Written with a softness that only Leslie Vernick could deliver but with a tenacity to motivate and help women recognize their plight, this book provides the practical insights they need to step into the emotional and relational freedom they deserve.”

—**Joshua Straub, PhD, coauthor of *God Attachment***

“Women in an emotionally abusive marriage do not need another book on how to have a good marriage; those books rub salt in raw wounds. No, they desperately need this book so that they can diagnosis just how bad their marriage is and then, with Leslie’s clear expertise, develop a plan that will either begin to turn their marriage around, strengthen them to stay and survive, or give them a wise route of escape. I was riveted from the first chapter and thanked God repeatedly for this clear manual for those who are in such need of a lifeline.”

—**Dee Brestin, author of *Idol Lies and The Friendships of Women***

“*The Emotionally Destructive Marriage* extends a lifeline of well-tested, biblically sound, practical, real help to women who are often at the end of their rope, end of their ability to cope, and end of their hope. Leslie’s common-sense wisdom and tender encouragement might help save your marriage, your family, and your future—and it will for sure save your sanity, your life, and your heart. Every leader, and every woman, needs copies to hand out.”

—**Pam Farrel, author of *The 10 Best Decisions a Woman Can Make and Men Are Like Waffles; Women Are Like Spaghetti***

“This book is a significant contribution to Christian literature on the subject of abuse in marriage. Into church cultures so often clouded by a fog of confusion and unbiblical tradition, Leslie’s words shine a welcome light. She understands the mentality and nature of abuse that drives these emotionally destructive marriages. I intend to put her book to use in our church in both women’s and men’s groups, and I would encourage Bible colleges and seminaries to do the same.”

—**Jeff Crippen, pastor and author of *A Cry for Justice: How the Evil of Domestic Abuse Hides in Your Church***

“Leslie’s book tackles a hidden epidemic behind the closed doors of many Christian homes. Leslie provides help—winsome yet tough, practical yet immensely biblical help—for those in destructive marriages. Counselors, pastors, and Christian ministry leaders are given a clear compass to know how to take a marriage from broken to whole, if both individuals are willing to work.”

—**Tim Clinton, PhD, president of the American Association of Christian Counselors and executive director of the Center for Counseling and Family Studies at Liberty University**

“Heart-to-heart reality checkup. Destructive myths and assumptions exposed. Marriages advanced. Women valued. Hopeful steps for real change. That’s how Leslie Vernick writes to women who are under attack in marriage. She provides fresh God-honoring solutions as she speaks life-changing truth for women. Her honesty and mandates for frustrated or failed marriage relationships are invigorating, incredible, practical, and based on the Bible.”

—**Roger Ball, senior pastor of First Baptist of Tempe**

“Finally, a voice being put to the very real problem of emotional abuse within a marriage and the invisible wounds it inflicts on the spirit, heart, and mind. Leslie Vernick brings light to the breakdown that happens in a relationship marked by toxic behavior. Her years of wisdom and expertise in this area, along with her biblical insight, are to be applauded. Thank you, Leslie, for being an advocate for freedom.”

—**Michelle Borquez, president of God Crazy Freedom, author of *Overcoming the Seven Deadly Emotions***

“We like to think that every marriage can be repaired and fully restored, but that’s not reality in this fallen world. Kudos to Leslie Vernick for being one of the first to address this reality. I’ll be recommending this book to many coaching clients in the coming years, because within these pages they’ll discover so many valuable assets. I particularly love how she teaches women four steps to develop CORE strength, which helps them deal with their destructive partner in truth and with grace.”

—**Shannon Ethridge, MA, relationship coach, speaker, and best-selling author of *Every Woman’s Battle***

About the Author

Leslie Vernick is licensed clinical social worker and relationship coach. For more than thirty years, she has helped individuals, couples, and families heal, rebuild, or grow their relationships. A popular author and speaker, she has written several books, including *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong* and the bestseller, *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*.

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Introduction

Hanging On by a Thread

It's easy to find a plethora of good books about how to be a godly wife or what steps to take to build a successful and happy marriage. There aren't many books written on how to wisely deal with a destructive and abusive marriage. As a counselor and coach, I have grown increasingly troubled by the advice hurting women receive from well-meaning pastors, Christian counselors, friends, and lay leaders when they seek help for their destructive and abusive marriages. Many times we've not understood the gravity of the problem. We've misdiagnosed a marriage that has terminal cancer and treated it as if it were only suffering from a common cold. We've also misplaced the responsibility for keeping the marriage alive by putting an extraordinarily heavy burden on a wife's shoulders to somehow maintain a loving and warm relationship with a husband who treats her with cruelty, disrespect, deceit, and gross indifference. It's not feasible, nor is it biblical.

Each week e-mails flood my inbox from women desperate for answers, hanging on to their marriages and sometimes their sanity by a single thread. The details vary, but the questions are usually the same: "What do I do?" and "Where do I turn for help?" The woman's spirit, and sometimes her body, is depressed and depleted from the distress she feels within the walls of her own home. She wants to honor God and do his will, but does that mean she must continue to allow herself to be destroyed by her husband, a man who has promised to love and protect her?

Marriage and family are important to God, but just as important to him are the individuals within those marriages and families. God does not value men more than women, or the institution of marriage more than the people who are in it. He wants to help you know how to heal and what to do to bring true restoration to your destructive marriage. He also knows that because of the hardness of your husband's heart, true reconciliation of your relationship isn't always possible.

Throughout this book you will clearly see what's wrong and why keeping the marriage together at all costs or at any price can be dangerous. You will gain fresh insights and a new paradigm in which to understand your role in your marriage. You'll learn strategies and be given tools so that you can find your own voice again and be able to develop the strength and courage to stand up against the destruction. Within these pages is a biblical road map to help you know whether genuine repentance and restoration is taking place, and what the specific steps are to get there.

The Emotionally Destructive Marriage is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Seeing Your Marriage Clearly," will help you distinguish the difference between a disappointing marriage and a destructive one. At the end of chapter 1, there is a self-administered test you can take to determine whether you are in a destructive marriage. In chapter 2 you will learn what a healthy marriage looks like and the three essential ingredients that are required for any relationship to flourish. Chapter 3 will open your eyes to the different types of destructive relationship patterns and why they are so damaging to you, your children, and your marriage. In chapter 4 you will see that God hates what's happening to you. He is with you and for you and wants to help you make changes so that genuine healing can take place.

Part 2, "Change Begins with You," opens with chapter 5 showing you the ways you may be unknowingly enabling the destruction in your marriage to continue. You will understand how being a true biblical helpmate is very different than staying inappropriately submissive and silent about the destruction. In chapter 6 you'll understand why trying harder in the traditional wifely ways will make a destructive marriage worse

and how the common teachings on biblical headship and submission can lead to an abuse of power and entitlement thinking. Chapter 7 will help you build internal core strength, so that when the time is right, you will be empowered to take firm yet godly action to protect yourself and your children. Then, in chapter 8, you will know exactly what you need to do to prepare before you have a difficult conversation with your husband about his destructive behaviors.

In part 3, “Initiating Changes in Your Marriage,” you’ll be given specific strategies to wake up your husband to his destructiveness and invite him to godly change. In chapter 9 you’ll discover how to speak up in love, using words that invite your spouse to stop his destructive behaviors and attitudes without shaming, scolding, or disrespecting him. In chapter 10 you will receive a plan on how to calmly confront your husband, together with examples of specific consequences you can implement if he refuses to listen. Chapter 11 takes you step by step through your biblical options if nothing changes in your marriage, and ways you can stay strong and God-centered in the midst of continued destructive behaviors. Lastly, in chapters 12 and 13, you’ll learn the specific changes that are required if a destructive marriage is to heal, and how you will know whether or not you’re making progress as a couple. In the closing epilogue, I invite you to read the words of an abusive man who is learning to become a better man.

I debated whether to write this book just for women or to include men, as they, too, are in destructive marriages and feel distraught, impotent, and confused about how to change the damaging dynamics in their marriages. In the end I decided to write this book for women, but if you are a man who is looking for answers for your destructive marriage, you will find help within the pages here if you can overlook the stories and illustrations depicting men as the primary perpetrators. You can also find additional resources at www.leslievernick.com/the-emotionally-destructive-marriage, if your wife is the one who is the destructive partner.

The individuals in each story are disguised except for those who have given me permission to use their real names. Some stories or characters are composites to illustrate a specific point. All are pictures of the painful realities some women must live with day after day, week after week, year after year.

Please hear me: God doesn’t want you to hang on by a thread, my friend. He gives you a lifeline. Grab hold of it and live.

Part I

Seeing Your Marriage Clearly

*The eye is the lamp of the body.
So, if your eye is healthy, your
whole body will be full of light,
but if your eye is bad, your whole
body will be full of darkness. If
then the light in you is darkness,
how great is the darkness!*

Jesus, in Matthew 6:22–23

One

Are You in an Emotionally Destructive Marriage?

*For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest;
nor is anything secret except to come to light.*
—Mark 4:22

Several years ago, while speaking in Hungary, I was shocked to see the new title the Hungarians had given one of my books when they translated it into their language. It was now called How to Survive a D-Minus Marriage. My sister, Patt, who had accompanied me on this speaking trip, joked with me about whether or not people would admit their marriages were that bad. But during the event, the book sold like hot cakes. Marriages everywhere are in dire straits. Christian homes are no exception.

You may feel as if you are in a D-minus marriage and have no idea what to do. I have help for you, but first it's important to clarify the difference between a disappointing marriage and a destructive one.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Tonia Jensen:

Reading a publication can be one of a lot of activity that everyone in the world loves. Do you like reading book therefore. There are a lot of reasons why people enjoyed. First reading a book will give you a lot of new facts. When you read a publication you will get new information simply because book is one of several ways to share the information as well as their idea. Second, examining a book will make an individual more imaginative. When you reading a book especially fictional works book the author will bring that you imagine the story how the people do it anything. Third, you are able to share your knowledge to other people. When you read this The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope, you may tells your family, friends as well as soon about yours guide. Your knowledge can inspire different ones, make them reading a e-book.

Warren Zeigler:

Beside this particular The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope in your phone, it might give you a way to get nearer to the new knowledge or facts. The information and the knowledge you are going to got here is fresh from oven so don't possibly be worry if you feel like an previous people live in narrow commune. It is good thing to have The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope because this book offers to you readable information. Do you often have book but you rarely get what it's exactly about. Oh come on, that wil happen if you have this within your hand. The Enjoyable set up here cannot be questionable, similar to treasuring beautiful island. So do you still want to miss the item? Find this book and read it from now!

Timothy Bullock:

This The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope is new way for you who has attention to look for some information mainly because it relief your hunger details. Getting deeper you on it getting knowledge more you know otherwise you who still having bit of digest in reading this The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope can be the light food to suit your needs because the information inside this book is easy to get by anyone. These books

produce itself in the form and that is reachable by anyone, yeah I mean in the e-book type. People who think that in guide form make them feel sleepy even dizzy this publication is the answer. So you cannot find any in reading a reserve especially this one. You can find what you are looking for. It should be here for an individual. So , don't miss the idea! Just read this e-book style for your better life in addition to knowledge.

Cara Shaver:

Do you like reading a guide? Confuse to looking for your favorite book? Or your book was rare? Why so many question for the book? But any kind of people feel that they enjoy intended for reading. Some people likes reading through, not only science book but novel and The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope as well as others sources were given expertise for you. After you know how the great a book, you feel desire to read more and more. Science reserve was created for teacher or maybe students especially. Those publications are helping them to include their knowledge. In some other case, beside science reserve, any other book likes The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope to make your spare time a lot more colorful. Many types of book like this one.

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