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Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

Emotional File Folders

Within each person lies a plethora of emotions and experiences. Depending on the level of commitment regarding how the individual seeks to bring resolution to unpleasant emotions and experiences will inevitably determine whether he/she carries “*emotional file folders*” deep inside. In other words, there is a wealth of emotions buried deep within each human being. Just the basic linguistic representation of biblical words and their structural perspective in the New Testament demonstrates that the general meaning of such words as καρδια, νοϋς, διάνοια, φρήν, γνώμη, and φρόνησις, relate to the mind and inner seat of one’s feelings.¹ Depending on how much the individual is still carrying such feelings as anger, resentment, bitterness, jealousy, etc., will determine their emotional health or instability. In Genesis 4: 7 (“...sin is crouching {i.e. waiting or lurking} at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must *master* it.”) and Ephesians 4:26 (“...*do not* let the sun go down on your anger.”), the biblical authors write about how

P.- *perfunctory-relationship operates on a superficial or indifferent level*
 E.- *xpectations-false beliefs are assumed and understood between both partners*
 G - *ranted-relationship is taken for granted with no special attention to the other spouse*
 S.- *elfishness-unwillingness of each partner to become “one-flesh”*
 C- *ommunication- surface level interaction between partners*



emotions held inside could lead to an unpleasant consequence. Occasionally, unresolved *emotional file folders* lead to depression from the depletion of certain neurological transmitters called serotonin, endorphins, acetylcholine (Ach), norepinephrine, and dopamine. I have seen in my practice, individuals who have harbored anger for so many years they eventually contracted serious illnesses and diseases. One client is presently on dialysis due to the anger that he has been harboring for 10 years against his wife. I have known other clients who have suffered from heart and respiratory conditions due to long-term bitterness that they have kept inside after someone has deeply hurt them. From both a biblical and physiological standpoint, the fact remains that there is a direct corollary between harboring unresolved emotions and the consequences that play out into the lives of people. While *emotional file folders* are no respecter of persons-single or married-the level of intensity is increased when emotional disconnectedness takes place within a relationship. However, in the context of a married

couple, the following excerpt will demonstrate a pattern of how an individual’s *emotional file folder* leads to marital discord.

Marital Time Continuum

Based on the chart above, a couple may experience discord within their relationship that has evolved over the course of time. This grid is not a “one size fits all” description but rather an attempt to help differentiate the pathology along the marital time continuum. As a man and woman endeavor to live together as husband and wife, they each carry preconceived ideas of how to communicate with one another. Embedded within those ideas is the notion of individuality that resonates from the many years the man and the woman have been single. And, to use a word picture, they each have been driving with their own life-automobile with all of its goals and dreams. The difficulty arises when the two remain seated in their own cars (lives) focused on driving toward whatever goal(s) and dream(s) they endeavor to accomplish without becoming “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). The man and the woman individually drive their own lives down the road of life without endeavoring to be seated

¹ Silva, M. *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*. Grand Rapids: MI., Zondervan. 1983, p. 95.

in one car. For example, he may be focused on his career while she works toward finishing her degree. As the two of them invest their energy along the lanes of life, the emotional connectedness slowly dissipates. Therefore, instead of working toward blending their lives into a selfless love relationship to and for the other, surface level *communication* becomes the first visible sign of marital discord. According to Genesis 2, God created man and woman for relationship. In verse 18, the only negative of His creation was that there was loneliness because nothing within creation satisfied Adam's longing for emotional connectedness. Therefore, when Eve was created from Adam's rib, there was both biological similarity (in contrast to the animal kingdom) as well as emotional compatibility (צורה, *one who assists or helps*).² The blending of two people mirrors the union of joy, contentment, and transparency found within the Godhead (cf. Colossians 1). Surface level *communication* is a precursor of two individuals focused on remaining constant in their own lane of life. As the husband and wife continue in their pursuit, eventually one of them will 'run out of gas' emotionally.

📖 Emotional Connectedness

No relationship can be sustained without emotional connectedness. As seen in Genesis 2, Adam yearned for companionship while he lived

² Gesenius, W. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: London, Clarendon Press, 1951, p.740.

alone on earth. And in the same way, when a husband and wife are driving their own "life-automobile", eventually one of them will crave for what God instituted within every human being: relationship. That craving-if not satisfied- will cause the desiring partner to "crash" their car as a means to reach out to the other partner for a change in the emotional makeup of the marriage. It is at this crucial point that determines whether both spouses agree to allow the mutual development of love, encouragement, and open communication to transform their individuality into a unified whole of a "one-flesh" relationship. If the acting partner receives little or no response, then he or she will attempt to do everything possible to convince their partner to change. Interestingly, I have seen many spouses strive to "fix" their mate on their own strength. They may use what they learned from a seminar, sermon, radio program, or personal family/friend in order to open the lines of communication. When their efforts are not acknowledged and applied, often the acting partner will board the proverbial ship called "frustration" and navigate it through the emotional storm of anger, bitterness, resentment, etc., while waiting for the other spouse to take the initiative and share in their emotional turmoil. Though spouses will often follow their mate into the storm how they respond is a different matter. For some, navigating their ship will remain in the eye of the hurricane where they feel comfortable because of their inability to deal with confrontation or because of a desire to not "rock the boat" from emotional turbulence. I have seen

couples that have been married for over twenty years and are just now starting to crash their "life-automobiles" for a ship of resolution! Yet, as the two individuals go through this crisis period in their marriage, one person is navigating through one or more *emotional file folders* (i.e. anger, bitterness, resentment) that continue to build for months and years. This is the individual who desires to establish emotional connectedness but is having difficulty because they have no idea where to begin. Initially, within the marriage, two people were focused on two separate goals and dreams. Communication between them remained at a surface level until one partner found themselves starving for genuine authenticity and love in the relationship. Some partners may "float" in the mire of their own individual *emotional file folder(s)* for a period of time while never getting any resolution. In the end, the marriage collapses because the emotional disconnect was too overwhelming. Others may last longer, because they each refocus their energy on blaming the other while never getting to the root of the problem in their own life. Consequently, instead of driving two separate cars, they now navigate two separate ships loaded with emotional baggage from the past! On the time line continuum of a marriage, *selfishness* becomes the next step that wedges itself between a husband and wife. An unwillingness to allow God to change oneself in accordance with Scripture (Ephesians 5:22-33; I Cor. 13; I Pt. 3) produces animosity and other facets of emotional discord. Interestingly enough, in the lives of some

people, their *selfishness* stems from an historical moment that disabled them emotionally from moving forward with their marriage. This is what I call *freeze frame*. In other words, the individual is held captive mentally by the hurt, pain, or shame from the past that causes them to live in the past rather than the present. It is as if their life is on hold-frozen in time-without any direction or zest for a fulfilling and meaningful life. Emotionally and psychologically, the individual is unable to control their thoughts of an incident or a series of incidents that made an indelible impression within their mind. Whether they experienced the trauma of sexual abuse or remember incidents relating to a divorce-theirs or their parents, a death of a loved one, an automobile accident, the day they were fired from their job, etc-any life circumstance that is frozen in time can impair an individual's capacity to give and receive as a human being to another human being. This is clearly seen in the book of Jonah where the prophet was commanded to preach to the city of Nineveh that the city was going to be destroyed by Yahweh. However, after Jonah had made up his mind, he discovers that God had changed His own mind about the punishment and "*it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry.*" (4:1). Jonah had prepared himself emotionally to witness the divine destruction upon the wicked city. He was so convinced that God would bring justice that when he waited and waited for God to enact His power and nothing happened Jonah could not move forward with his life. And, he not only dwells on the past but he also impersonates the same emotion

of anger that was described about God in 3:9 (חרה)! Jonah is not only frozen in time to what should have happened he also rationalizes his conviction: "...was not this what *I* said while *I* was still in *my* own country?...in order to forestall this *I* fled to Tarshish, for *I* knew that You are gracious..." (4:2). Jonah refused to have the same compassion as God. Instead, he *selfishly* focused on himself and asks that God would take his life (4:3). The *freeze frame* that took place in Jonah's life is the same emotional reaction that occurs in anyone who chooses to be incarcerated by a negative circumstance. Whether the outgrowth of *selfishness* is a *freeze frame* or suicide (as in Jonah's case) or an adamant refusal to selflessly love one's partner; the end result becomes a wedge that slowly pushes a couple farther apart. Once surface level communication and selfishness stand between a couple, the relationship is *taken for granted* with little desire to give attention to the other. Attempting to establish a new course in the marriage with one's partner can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Therefore, the wind of self-centeredness within the storm of one's anger and frustration propels the married person to gradually stop making efforts to work on the marriage. Rather than seek measures to repair the relationship and return to shore so that both husband and wife learn how to become one flesh in the one lane of life, their ship aimlessly wanders over the course of time with the assumption that the marriage is as good as it is going to get. At this point, there is a subtle

inference between both partners in refusing to make any changes-personally or corporately. So many marriages that have been *taken for granted* present themselves with a false appearance before family and friends. In fact, issues are dealt with on a superficial level rather than working through one's feelings so as to develop emotional intimacy. For example, a couple may have excellent communication skills regarding the schedules and financial affairs of the home. As parents, they may be well organized with the kids school and church activities including their own social agendas. However, no attempt is made to go below the day-to-day stuff of life and work towards developing an emotional-spiritual union of two people. The pathological consequence for such a contrived display may result in major depression or Dysthymia or an eating disorder. The internal *emotional file folder* continues to grow as one or both partners starve for emotional intimacy. In some instances, partners may immerse themselves in their career in order to avoid conflict or satisfy their sexual needs outside the boundaries of marriage. Yet, the assumption is: "if he/she is not willing to talk about what separates us, I'm content to live my life without any interference." And so, by giving each other permission to invest little or no special attention, the husband and wife live a superficial existence. When a marriage reaches this point in the continuum, the cry that was once from within now becomes a scream of anger, frustration, and bitterness manifested in the form of *false*

*expectations.*³ Recall that initially in the relationship both husband and wife neglected to communicate their goals and dreams. Over the course of time, each partner began to develop and catalogue *expectations* of the other. As those *expectations* found its way into the mix of selfishness and unresolved feelings, they

became ignited when one partner began talking to the other with words of confrontation rather than with words of consolation (Col. 4:6). Therefore, a relationship that *takes each other for*

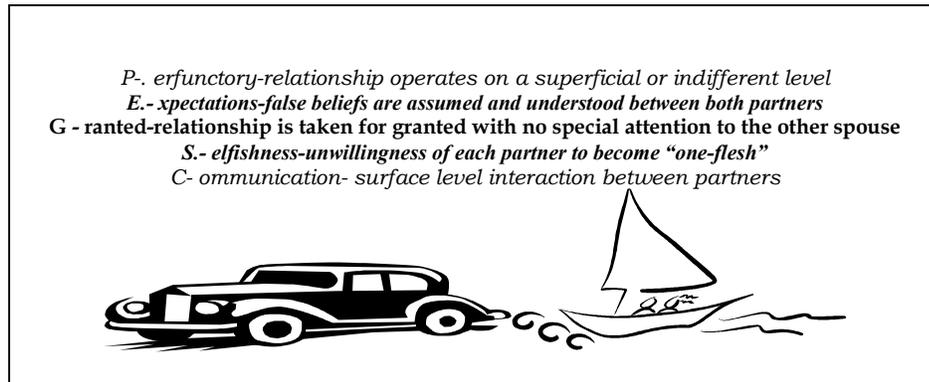
granted inevitably knows no other form of dialogue other than a contentious struggle of finger pointing at the other person. False beliefs are assumed about one's spouse with an attempt to try to micromanage the other person's life based on a preconceived list of what they think will happen, is happening, or did happen in the past. On page (6) is a list of ten common false expectations.

Once the foretaste of distress enters a marriage from false expectations, the individual ship of their lives charts a *perfunctory* course. According to Webster's New World Dictionary, *perfunctory* is defined as that "which is done without care or interest or merely as a form or routine."⁴ Before a

marriage ends in separation or divorce, the couple functions with an indifferent attitude towards one another. What initially started in the relationship when *selfishness* crept between them, now raises its ugly head for the final phase of destruction. The couple appears to be in a catatonic state of emotional

wife. If each partner neglects or rejects the notion of developing a union of their goals, dreams, and expectations, then the marriage will drive selfishly on two separate lanes of life. The proverbial "crash" of emotional disconnectedness will lead one partner to try to repair the relationship. Without a blending

of love and acceptance between two people whom God has joined together, the hurting partner will seek another



coldness individually draped with a hardened shell that protects the pain they feel deep inside. Those who come for counseling present themselves at this level with an inability to recognize their feelings or emotions. The course of their lives is set almost as if on 'auto pilot' in which each partner performs the usual or customary tasks on a daily basis. What was once meaningful now becomes meaningless. Deep inside, lies the pain of (an) *emotional file folder(s)* that become(s) the identifying mark of their individual ship's cargo for the rest of their lives.

Depending on the degree of love, encouragement, and open communication, will determine what level a couple is experiencing along the marital time continuum. Again, the biblical precedent for becoming "one flesh" is what God has ordained between a husband and

course of direction for their marriage. That course will set sail from the pain of their own *emotional file folder* and be navigated within an emotional turmoil as a coping mechanism to alert the other partner for a change to take place in the relationship. As noted in the various stages of the marital time continuum, each level becomes increasingly difficult to resolve because of the hidden layers of hurt and pain. By identifying the exact stage of the marital time continuum will enable the counselor to better understand the pathology and style of communication taking place between the husband and wife. From that point, the counseling session can begin to chart a new course that begins to help each partner uncover their feelings and develop a framework for effective communication with one another.

³ Wright, N. *So You're Getting Married*, Ventura: CA. Regal Books, 1985, pp.103-119; Wright, N.

Marriage Counseling, Ventura: CA. Regal Books, 1995, pp. 147-151.

⁴ Webster's New World Dictionary, Second College Edition, New York:

The World Publishing Company, 1972, p.1056.

 **Newsletter of**
Stonebriar Counseling Associates

From the desk of...

Bob Good
September, 2003



Sexual Addiction Group Meeting
Tuesday Nights at 7:00 pm
Location: SCA office



Dear Educator and Ministry Leader:

Rick and Julie appeared to be an attractive couple with a smile on their face and a firm handshake when we first met in the waiting room of my office. After the cordialities and a couple of sips of coffee from our coffee mugs, it became increasingly clear that what was seen on the outside was unquestionably not the same as what they were experiencing on the inside.

Rick and Julie's marriage was on the proverbial "rocks" with no hope or vision for a peaceful resolve. In fact, this was a couple in which one of the partners had already served the other partner papers for a divorce prior to coming in for counseling. Now, once the outwardly pleasant couple sat down in my office, all the pleasantries quickly dissolved and I was faced with what was soon to be an ugly battle between two people who had been married for over 19 years! Though Rick and Julie are not their real names, the situation is an accurate representation in the lives of hundreds of couples I have personally met over several years of counseling.

While each couple brings to the counseling session different faces, socioeconomic backgrounds and geographical locations, the following article presents one perspective concerning the psychological-emotional-spiritual dynamics taking place within a struggling marriage. It has been my experience in talking with counselors and ministry leaders the need for some type of concise predictable measurement so as to identify marital conflict dynamics and how they interface with each other within a relationship. The problem has been that while there is a plethora of resources the time factor in consolidating the information into a user friendly format becomes so overwhelming. Over the past few years I have seen new and insightful material addressing critical issues on marriage counseling. However, in choosing which book to read and selecting which counseling principles to catalogue in our approach can indeed become frustrating. Therefore, it is the goal of this paper to equip the counselor/pastor with a diagnostic tool by which to accurately assess the couple and to quickly provide the best treatment intervention.

Sincerely,
Bob

1. Expecting to **judge** what is said **by first giving the silent treatment**-rather than value and respect the person's present feelings and perspective of the marriage, the silent partner refuses to believe his/her partner will change.
2. **Saving historical events for later**-“cashing in” with one's pent-up irritations and frustrations about the behavior and/or attitudes of one's spouse. Accusations or innuendos, slurs, and other “smart” remarks are based in the past rather than staying in the present.
3. Expecting the spouse to be a **mind reader**-unrealistic demands on how the other person acts or thinks without bothering to check out your assumptions.
4. **Fortune telling**-Because the event happened in the past, the spouse thinks it will continue forever: “He'll/she'll never change. Even if I did my part, it wouldn't do any good.” A belief or conviction that is convinced the other person will not change unfairly categorizes people without the benefit of the doubt.
5. One has to have **certain and perfect control**-it is believed that the man or woman has to have control over the other individual's behavior (i.e. what friends they talk to; where they socialize; family member(s) not to talk to, etc.). To compensate for the pain, the individual will demand perfection from one's spouse as well as from herself/himself (i.e. do the best job, get the best grades, etc).
6. **Throwing your feelings at your spouse**-“I know I have a temper, but so did my dad. Therefore, my wife has to learn to live with it-my mom did” The spouse creates a double standard expectation: perfect obedience from wife, but violent behavior for himself.
7. **Attacking the person rather than the problem** with labels-“It's my stupid wife's fault for making me angry!” Calling someone names reduces them to a mere object. The false expectation stems from what is perceived and justified by manipulating the other person with highly emotional and explosive statements.
8. **Expecting to solve the problem by exaggerating**-Words like “never,” “always,” “all,” and “everyone,” become sweeping generalizations that lock the other spouse into a restrictive frame of reference. Using loaded statements such as: “You're never on time.” “You're always saying things like that.” “All women are emotional.” “All men are like that!” places one's spouse on the defensive when the expectation is to exaggerate in order to get their attention.
9. **Expecting that our spouse exhibit certain traits or behaviors**-The expectation is based on creating inflexible rules for the partner to think and act in the same way as the other spouse. Rather than accept and accentuate the person's uniqueness, the expectation is to make every effort to conform them into one's own image or likeness. The rules are rewritten by using such words as “should,” “ought,” and, “must,” for greater inflexibility.
10. **Expecting to analyze our spouse by offering solutions with criticisms**-By playing psychologist with such statements like: “Now you are saying that because...” makes the other partner feel like they are a case study. Focusing on their differences as part of the problem becomes an unrealistic expectation that may result in frustration and anger.



Upcoming Free Workshop

Please RSVP



Spousal Abuse—Signs To look for/When To Refer—Sept. 18, '03

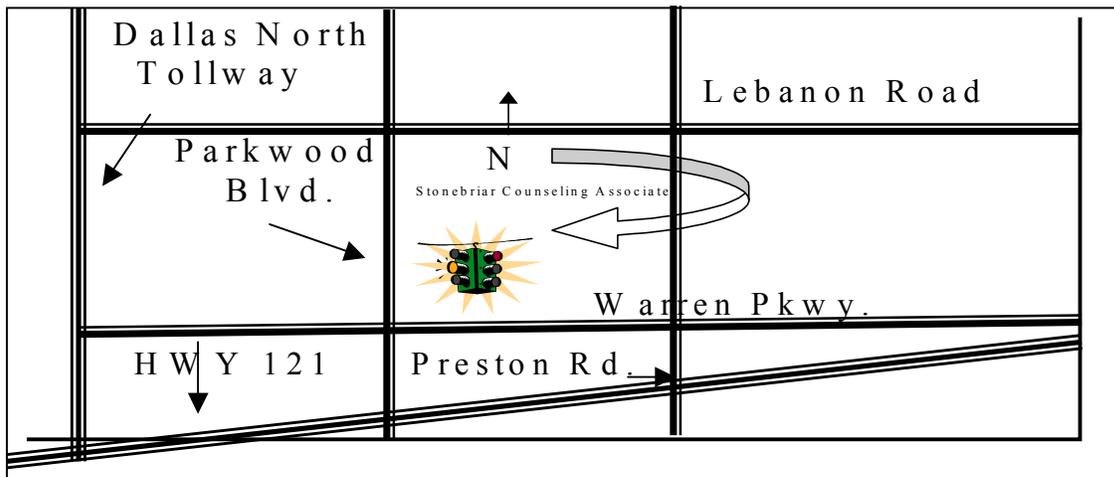
(Free Coffee and Donuts) Time: 6:30 PM

Location: 3550 Parkwood Blvd., Suite 301, Bldg. C, Frisco, Texas

Call SCA office at 214-642-8737 to register



New Location!!



Mission Statement

Stonebriar Counseling Associates (SCA) is purposefully passionate in providing quality psychotherapy from a Christian perspective that influences the treatment of psychological, emotional, and mental health issues.

To this end, SCA is committed to glorify God by:

- Believing that each person has the innate ability for personal growth and wholeness.
- Seeking a variety of approaches to help you learn new skills and find more choices so as to manage life's changes with a broader range of solutions for recognizing your strengths.
- Accepting all people with respect and love regardless of age, sex, race, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status.
- Thoughtfully affirming and carefully following the morals of the Christian faith and the ethics of the professional governing boards.
- Providing research and development for new and innovative programs, seminars, and workshops in order to further the well-being and self-sufficiency of each client.