

Is Your Marriage “Stuck” in Winter?



This past year of COVID 19, lockdowns, empty shelves in stores, school closings, and wearing masks everywhere have all taken their toll on families, relationships, and marriages. Besides that, for many of us we are also walking through a longer and colder winter than we have experienced for several years. I know all of this has impacted our marriage in a variety of ways. In January I (Rick) tested positive for COVID 19 and for the next two weeks Sue and I slept in separated bedrooms, used separate bathrooms, and had very limited touching or kissing each other. That was hard for both of us! We had been praying and fasting before my getting sick and we had a pretty full schedule during the month. By the end of the month, we were at a pretty low level relationally!



If you stay married long enough, you will probably go through what are referred to as the “four seasons of marriage.” Just like in nature, there are seasons of Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter in every marriage. The only different is that marriage seasons don’t necessarily follow each other in sequence or come at specific intervals in time. Seasonal changes in a marriage are not directly caused by the difficulties or circumstances of life, but by the way in which couples respond to those challenges and each other.

Spring is always a season of new beginnings full of excitement, joy, and hope. There’s high levels of anticipation, optimism, gratitude, love, and trust. The relationship is tender, nurturing, open, caring, and full of excitement.

Summer is where we reap the benefits of what we have planted and nurtured in the Spring. This time is filled with happiness, accomplishments, connection, peace, and fun. Couples are praying together and communicating freely with support and understanding. Conflicts are easily resolved, differences are turned into assets, and there is a growing sense of togetherness.

Fall is the prelude to Winter with its chilling winds that rip off the leaves. Emotions tend to lean towards fear, sadness, confusion, frustration, rejection, resentment, exhaustion, and dejection. Uncertainty, blaming, disengagement, and detachment come from drifting apart, being too busy with activities, ignoring each other’s needs, and living in the afterglow of Summer.

Winter can bring the stronger emotions of anger, hurt, disappointment, rejection, and loneliness which can trigger destructive or violent behavior, harsh words, not speaking, or withdrawing. Relationships become detached, harsh, cold, or bitter. Conversations turn into arguments or the spouse withdraws in silence. There is no sense of togetherness, a loss of hope, and despair. There is little or no interaction and the marriage is like two ships passing in the night or married singles living together.



For Sue and I, it wasn’t my sickness or the full schedule that took us into a fall/winter season of our marriage, but the way we allowed the sickness and busyness to affect us and our relationship. By the end of January, we were experiencing a cold chill from a lack of closeness, touching, conversation, quality time together, and fun or playful interaction with each other. We became more irritable, easily offended, expressing more negative emotions, and felt alone, isolated, and discouraged. The cold winds of winter were blowing not only outside but through our house!



Fortunately, we have experienced too many wonderful seasons in our marriage to let this go on for too long. Sue was the first to recognize what was going on and took authority over all the negative forces of division and strife and commanded them to go. We asked each

other's forgiveness, affirmed our commitment and love for each other, and started, on purpose, interacting with each other. We expressed our appreciation for each other and told some joy stories to get our relational circuits turned back on. Sue left me some of her notes of encouragement, fixed nice meals, and I began hugging, touching, and doing fun silly things to make her smile and laugh. We put a puzzle together, played some dice games, and watched some funny and romantic movies while we held each other. It wasn't long until the signs of Spring started to show up again and our relationship moved to a different season!

To help with communications, Sue bought a small stuffed Teddy bear holding a heart. We have had fun using CASI to signal to the other person our desire to get together and talk, share what's on our heart, or to just have some fun!! We named him CASI to remind us to be

Curious – ask questions – It's shows you are interested in the other person and is an easy way to starts meaningful conversations.

Attune – Let the other person know that “I see you” “I hear you.” “I understand what you're going through.” “I'm here for you.” and “I want to help you.”

Sensitive – Be aware of where the other person is at emotionally and spiritually so you can be tender and gentle and come alongside of them, not judge, criticize, intimidate, or overwhelm them.

Intimate – I'll let you use your imagination about what this one means!



CASI

If you find your marriage in a fall or winter season, you might try some of the things we did or explore our archived Marriage Encouragements at our website

<https://abbasarmsintl.org/category/marriage-encouragements/>

Dialogue Questions

1. What season is our marriage in right now? How Does That Make Me Feel?
2. What can we do together to move our marriage into a better season than it is in right now or what can we do to keep our marriage in the good season we're in right now? How Does That Make Me Feel?

Fun Night Ideas

1. Plan a “Stay-Cation” where you don't go away, but stay at home and act like you're on vacation. Turn off all your electronic devices and just focus all of your time on each together. Plan on going to a romantic restaurant or quiet place to eat a special meal together. Watch a romantic movie and pop some popcorn or make your favorite snack together and eat it while you watch the movie.
2. Plan a “Game Night” where you play your favorite games together. Don't keep score or get competitive, just encourage each other as you play just for the fun of it! Finish the evening by cuddling on the sofa and listen to your favorite songs or some romantic music together.