



*Restoring Marriages from the
Devastation of Sexual Sin*

From
ASHES *to*
BEAUTY
JEFF COLÓN

STUDY GUIDE INCLUDED

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FROM ASHES TO BEAUTY

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Recently a friend of mine confided to me that he had been struggling with a particular type of habitual sin. Although he was very hesitant to bring his secret life into the light, desperation finally drove him to seek help. It was then that he found the healing and forgiveness he had been longing for.

You've got to know that it was a very humbling moment for him to walk through those doors the first time. "What would someone think if they saw me there?" he worried. "What if my friends and family found out?" He, like most men, felt that he could fix any problem that might come his way by himself. When he had to ask others for help, he was admitting that he was in trouble...that he was weak. This is not something that most men would readily say.

So what was the result of him taking that first humbling step? In a word...*strength*. Yes, strength comes from humbling moments. There's an old adage that says: "That which doesn't kill us makes us stronger." Well, I suppose there's some truth to that, but it's not from the Bible. What Scripture *does* say is that God gives strength to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5-6)

If you are thinking, "My marriage can never again be beautiful because I have destroyed it with my sexual sin;" or if you feel as weak and defeated as you ever have; or if you have

resigned yourself to the thought that your situation is too far gone and beyond hope; please hear me. Amazing strength is being offered to you and your spouse—yes, it is strength that is beyond you—but nevertheless it is being made available to you!

There are four “miracle marriage” true stories described in this book. The names are *Danny and Paula*, *Tom and Sue*, *Bill and Teri*, and *Carl and Linda*. They were just four normal American couples. To the outside observer they probably would have looked like happy Christian marriages. But when sexual sin entered in, each one of these marriages was nearly destroyed.

Well... allow me to add “miracle marriage number five” to the list. Their names: *Clay and Renee*. That’s right, my wife and I have walked a road of healing very similar to the couples in this book. In 1998, I confessed to Renee that I was viewing pornography. I had gotten to the point that I was sick of it. Actually, the truth is that I was sick of me. Although I never actually committed adultery, in my mind I had many times.

That humbling moment when I confessed this to Renee has opened up our marriage to blessings that we never had experienced beforehand. I know that confession can be very painful; it sure was for me! But in some supernatural—only by God—way, He provided us with the strength to endure the healing process we went through over the months and years that followed. Today, we can truly say that we are thankful for that season because of where He has brought us!

I encourage you not to resist God’s dealings with you. Admit what you’ve done, repent of your sins and run to Jesus like never before!

With this book, Jeff Colón offers you a solid and biblical approach to deal with the issues you will face as a couple. He uses the Beatitudes from Matthew 5 to guide you and your spouse into healing, hope and ultimately into victory! You may look at that word *victory* and still see no way that you and your

spouse could ever get there. You may think, “That’s great for those couples in the book, but my marriage is just over, there’s simply no going back.”

I’ll say it again: Run to Jesus like never before! He loves you both more than you know and He wants to perform His marvelous work in your marriage. Do you think this task is beyond Him? Think again. He is supremely able, and lovingly willing, to walk with you and provide the strength that is seemingly beyond you.

Clay Crosse
holyhomes.org



INTRODUCTION

The burden in my heart had been constantly growing. While counseling couples over the years and seeing firsthand the devastation wrought by sexual sin upon so many marriages, the grief mounted to the point where I felt compelled to do more. I was especially grieved to see so many marriages being relegated to the ash heap of divorce. This book was birthed out of that burden of grief and the conviction that things do not have to be this way, especially among Christians.

I know in my heart that no situation is beyond God's ability to restore. Since God restored my marriage with Rose 15 years ago, I have witnessed countless marriages reclaimed from the ash heap and transformed into beautiful representations of God's love and forgiveness. That's what can happen when true repentance occurs and each spouse enters into vital contact with God, His great, precious promises, and His will for their lives. God does not change; He still gives us beauty for ashes. (Isaiah 61:3)

The spiritual truths shared in this book are designed to bring about a deeper walk with God for both spouses. That is the answer to your situation, whatever it may be. You will find that as you draw close to God He takes care of the problems that seem so big to us. *There is absolutely no reason why a truly "Christian" marriage should ever fail, even after sexual sin has*

occurred. When both spouses are living in a vital and intimate relationship with Jesus, everything else will follow.

Fifteen years ago, as Rose and I surveyed the effects of sexual sin on our marriage, all we saw was a mountainous pile of rubble and ashes. We empathized with Nehemiah and how he must have felt when he received the report of Jerusalem's condition: "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in *great distress* and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also *broken* down, and its gates are *burned* with fire." Nehemiah had the overwhelming task before him of having to rebuild the walls from this state of utter ruin. He knew that his only source of strength and hope must come from the One who could do what was impossible for man. Consequently, he tearfully prayed for God to intervene: "So it was, when I heard these words that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven." (Nehemiah 1:3-4, emphasis added)

Like Nehemiah witnessing the devastation of sin and its consequences, a couple dealing with the aftermath of sexual sin faces the same overwhelming sense of destruction and despair over what lies ahead. All they can see is the huge pile of debris remaining from what used to be their marriage. Shattered emotionally, they are easily overwhelmed. Battered spiritually, they are rife with uncertainty. Restoring and rebuilding their marriage is a daunting task. Like Nehemiah, their only source of strength and hope must come from the One who can do what is impossible for man.

Beloved, allow God to draw you to Him through these pages and He will turn your mountainous issues into mole hills and give you more than you bargained for. Don't limit God, He has so much He wants to give you and your spouse in every situation and through every trial you will face.

I assure you, God can give you the spiritual wherewithal to rebuild your marriage out of the ruins of sexual sin, or any kind

of difficulty that may have arisen in your marriage. As you go through this book, please do so prayerfully and remain open to what God has for you. Take your time and don't be in a hurry; God isn't in a hurry. You may even want to go over some things more than once. At the back of the book you will find a study guide for each chapter. I have included this to help you apply what you have read and to allow God to do for you spiritually what He wants to do. The Word of God tells us that being hearers only is not profitable. (James 1:22) These assignments should be done with that in mind. God has something for you, but you will have to do what He is asking.

*“I, Jeff, take thee, Rose to be
my wedded wife, to have and to hold
from this day forward, for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health,
to love and to cherish, 'til death do us part,
according to God's holy ordinance;
thereto I pledge my love.”*

Chapter One

PREREQUISITES TO A RESTORED MARRIAGE



*I*t was May 4, 1991. The sky was painted a heavenly blue and accented with lazy white clouds. The early spring foliage was a rich green, and even the air seemed fresh and clean in New York City that morning. It was the beautiful, pristine kind of day couples dream about for their marriage ceremony. Rose, my wife to be, stood hand in hand with me at the altar. As we expressed our wedding vows to one another, I looked into her eyes and I could see the same bright hopefulness and expectation that every bride has on her wedding day.

Her hopes were anchored in the belief that I would love and cherish her and meet her needs. She had expectations that I would provide and care for her, and give her a life of happiness with abundant blessings. Isn't that what we all expect from our marriage? Isn't our mate supposed to complete and fulfill us, and to make all of our dreams come true? Isn't that how all of the storybook romances end, and shouldn't we, too, expect to live happily ever after?

Nevertheless, it only took a few weeks before our fairy tale crumbled as my twelve-year history of sexual sin and drug abuse resurfaced. Rose was devastated. Here we were, just three months into our marriage, and I was off to a Christian drug rehab program. I spent the next eight months away from home,

but we clung to the hope that our marriage would be better when I got out.

During my time in rehab, the Lord gave my wife a Scripture that helped her to hold on: “Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; nor be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth. . . For your Maker is your Husband. . . the Lord has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused.” (Isaiah 54:4-6) Although Rose may not have fully understood at this point, the Lord was revealing to her that it was *His will* for her to pass through this barren wilderness, where there would be many tears. She was confident that He had called her to this but desperately hung on to the hope that she would soon “forget the shame of her youth.” She latched onto the encouraging aspect of this word from God, thinking to herself, “Finally, I will have a wonderful marriage. Things will be different; now we can enjoy a happy life together.”

Little did we know, the worst had just begun, and we had only started our long, hard journey.

Two weeks after I completed Teen Challenge, I was back to my old ways. I resumed my pursuit of sin, sometimes spending days away from home living in seedy motels. I had encounters with prostitutes in my hotel room or in my car right on the street. I watched pornography for hours at a time while getting high on crack cocaine. After each binge, I returned home to Rose, earnestly vowing never to do it again. I faithfully attended church and dutifully “repented” at the altar following each binge. Afterward, I would do well for a short time, only to fall back into the same pattern every few months. Each time I failed, Rose felt greater despair and hopelessness. “Is this all I have to look forward to?” she would ask herself. “Is this the way marriage is supposed to be? What’s wrong with *ME*? Why am I not enough for him? Why is God punishing me like this? I thought I married a godly man. . . he’s part of the worship team

in our church every Sunday. *Where is God in all of this?*"

After pursuing my sin over and over again, my pastor, Jimmy Jack, finally intervened. He recommended that I enter a program under the auspices of Times Square Church in Manhattan called Timothy House. I spent *another* three months away from home. In spite of all I was putting her through, Rose would faithfully drive into the seedy neighborhood where I was staying to visit me every week. Something seemed to be happening in me and she valiantly held onto the marriage with all the hope she could muster.

We both felt that our lives would be different when I left the program. And I was different—for a while. The confidence I felt in dealing with my addictions grew, and the outward results were positive. Several months of "sobriety" buoyed Rose's hopes. We were both in for yet another bitter disappointment, though. It wasn't long before I returned to the pig pen, wallowing in the muck and mire of my sin and dragging our marriage vows back through the cesspool. I came to realize later that the success I initially enjoyed during that time came from my own determination—a faulty foundation built on the sinking sand of self-reliance.

Despite the intervention of two good Christian programs, the end result left Rose living with a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. From Sunday to Friday, I played the part of a Christian, one who could easily talk the talk when necessary, and worked at my job as an elevator mechanic in Manhattan. But by Friday something would begin to come over me, and I would inevitably spend the next 36 hours in the filthy world of 42nd Street visiting adult bookstores, smoking crack cocaine and hooking up with prostitutes. Nevertheless, Sunday morning I would be right back in church playing in the worship team as if nothing had happened. The future of our marriage seemed bleak to Rose and yet, she felt as though the Lord wanted her to stick it out. I felt just as hopeless: nothing is more miserable than knowing the truth while living in unrepentant sin.

Like most men who are living in habitual sin, I was a master at deception. I had all the right lines for my wife whenever questionable things came up. Later, when the truth came out, she was left with the same old feelings of betrayal. She was constantly made to feel like the fool, trying to believe her husband even when her intuition told her differently.

Rose didn't always know how to respond. Sometimes she would even explode in anger. One time I came home and found all of my belongings strewn all over the street, thrown out the window from our fifth floor apartment. Of course, there were also plenty of moments when she felt as though she just couldn't endure another disappointment and that it was time to leave. Inevitably though, the Lord would move on her heart and she would once again forgive me and encourage me to get right with God. Sometimes she would even pray all night for me while I was out carousing. Meanwhile, I continued to trample on her heart, leaving her in a long, dark tunnel with no light at the end.

After three years of marriage, my dual role as a "Christian" husband and a drug-using sex addict came crashing down. My life was a shambles and my marriage was in ruins. Pastor Jimmy Jack once again intervened. This time he gave me an ultimatum: I must either go to Pure Life Ministries (PLM), a program for sexual addiction in Kentucky, or be excommunicated from the church.

I was furious with him and even angry at Rose. All I could envision was some weird, hillbilly scene straight out of the movie *Deliverance*. Everything in me was screaming "No!" yet I also knew I was out of options. I reluctantly boarded the bus for Kentucky amidst a blinding snowstorm. In spite of the fact that I arrived at PLM full of anger, pride and confusion, deep inside I also knew that I needed to find God in the worst way. Rose, too, sensed she needed a fresh breakthrough with the Lord. She knew that our marriage was an idol and that she needed to give preeminence to the Lord in her heart. Moreover, she had to face

the very real possibility that I would fail again. It was obvious to both of us that we had to put our marriage into His hands.

We needed more than a marriage improvement book. We needed a cleansing of our hearts and a deep spiritual work if we were to have a lasting marriage.

God used my sexual sin as the means to drive us to our knees. In time, He would show us how our circumstances could be used to bring blessings into our lives, but first we needed to learn to love and obey Him. We both had a long way to go, but over time the Lord dramatically changed our lives. We also came to realize that we weren't the only Christian couple facing overwhelming marital problems.

REBUILDING A DEVASTATED MARRIAGE

Internet pornography and sexual sin has flourished in the Church in recent years, destroying innumerable marriages in the process. In an online poll of 10,000 Christians conducted by Focus on the Family several years ago, 47% stated that pornography had been a problem in their home. No doubt this onslaught of sexual sin has played a part in the fact that the divorce rate within Christian homes is hovering around 50 percent—about the same as the rest of our nation. Commenting on this phenomenon, Barna Project director Meg Flammang said: “We would love to be able to report that Christians are living very distinct lives and impacting the community, but in the area of divorce rates they continue to be the same.”¹ Christians divorcing at the same rate as unbelievers? Is it possible that we can do no better than the unbelieving world in dealing with our problems?

My own marriage could have easily become one of those statistics. Rose had every reason to divorce me, and she most certainly would have if God had not intervened and performed a miracle. That was over 15 years ago. Since then, I have been

privileged to witness countless marriages lifted from the ash heap and transformed into beautiful representations of God's love and forgiveness. That's what can happen when both husband and wife live in repentance and appropriate God's tremendous promises for their lives.

However, I need to make it clear at the outset that the goal of this book is not to sort out the roles of the husband and wife; provide tips for raising godly children; or to encourage more fulfilling romance and sexual intimacy—though we will touch on some of these topics. *The intent here is to demonstrate that only a deep relationship with Jesus Christ can produce a fulfilling marriage.* When both spouses are living in a vibrant and intimate relationship with Him, everything else will fall into place.

Ultimately, marriage is a matter of the heart. If a marriage is to be preserved, then hearts must change. This is where God always does His work in a person's life. And it's amazing how all of the other problems besetting the marriage are somehow resolved as God deals separately with each spouse's heart.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF RESTORATION

In subsequent chapters, you will find that the theme of this book is drawn from Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes found in Matthew 5 are meant to become a spiritual foundation in each heart. God can use those building blocks to raise a marriage out of the ashes of sexual sin and into His glory. If the Holy Spirit is allowed to have His way, He will construct a marriage truly reflecting Christ's beauty on earth.

The truth is that the Beatitudes reveal seven states or qualities of the spiritual life that God desires for His people. They also represent seven aspects of His character. It could be compared to the spectrum of colors generated by passing a beam of light through a prism. The light is broken down into seven distinct colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Just

as we can observe that there are seven different colors in the same beam of light, so the Beatitudes enable us to behold and appreciate each of the aspects of God's character individually. He desires His children to reflect these divine qualities in their own lives. This is the greatest reflection of His glory possible.

In his book, *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry*, Steve Gallagher wrote, "The Beatitudes contain all that is involved in the process of transformation. Those seven verses, Matthew 5:3-9, describe how a person is prepared for repentance, how it unfolds, and the life that accompanies it."² In the same way that those seven blessings provide a road to spiritual recovery for a life ruined by sin, so too they provide a blueprint for the restoration of a marriage devastated by sin. Let's take a cursory look at how this process unfolds.

Before this rebuilding process can begin, there must first be a solid foundation. Thus this building project must begin with *poverty of spirit*. God must bring both spouses to an end of their own resources, abilities and strengths in order to accomplish His work in their lives. It is as they stand empty-handed at the foot of the Cross, that He is able to begin the work of rebuilding their lives and marriage.

The first place the Lord begins this marvelous restorative work is teaching each spouse how to focus on his or her own failures, rather than on those of their mate. This awareness of one's sinfulness brings about a sense of godly sorrow: *blessed are those who mourn*. As each spouse acknowledges and repents over their own sin, they become compassionate toward their mate's struggles. This new camaraderie further strengthens the foundation within the marital relationship.

Sinful behavior, and the marital problems that result from it, are ultimately rooted in a lack of submission to God's authority. But the repentance that comes about through godly sorrow humbles the person into a state of *meekness*: a subjection of

one's will to the will of Another. As both spouses begin to obey and to actually live God's Word, a new atmosphere fills their home. Mutual support and camaraderie replace the selfishness, defensiveness and finger-pointing.

Inevitably, meekness begets a *hunger for righteousness*. As the couple grows in their desire to please God, Christ is able to reign in the center of the marriage. This new mindset will cause the couple to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Couples will need to examine their priorities in life, including how they invest their time and resources. God can only bless a marriage that is in line with His desires. Ultimately, a marriage can only glorify God when both spouses hunger and thirst to be like Jesus.

It is the *merciful* who are promised mercy from God. Most marital problems arise from a selfish preoccupation with one's own rights and desires. However, the process of repentance found in the Beatitudes brings people into the love of God, and this is especially true in the marriage setting. Consequently, rather than each spouse settling into a selfish preoccupation with their own rights and desires, they both learn to consider the needs of the other. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," said Jesus. (Acts 20:34) One of those blessings is that the more each mate shows mercy to the other, the more they are sure to receive in return.

By this point in the process, another fruit of repentance, purity of heart, will emerge. Not only will the *pure in heart* see God, as the beatitude promises, but they will also enjoy freedom from controlling sin. The effects of habitual sin on the marriage are deep and pervasive. As both spouses proceed through the process of repentance, however, sinful attitudes are exposed in the Light. Issues that are buried deep within the heart come to the surface and are dealt with. Little by little their hearts will become purified and they will gain a greater sight of God. What is happening in their individual hearts will also be expressed in the marriage.

Finally, as a couple allows the first six spiritual truths to be worked into them, the last beatitude simply arises as the culmination of all the others in God's transforming process. The closer a person comes to Christ, the more he or she will become what Jesus called a *peacemaker*. Where once strife and disunity permeated the marriage, the couple is now able to reconcile differences and enjoy godly communication with each other. Harmony in the marital relationship is the crowning fruit of a life of repentance.

FOLLOWING THE MAP

The previous section offers a roadmap for the restoration of an ailing marriage. Having a clear-cut path to marital unity should be a great source of encouragement to the sincere husband and wife. However, that map to success is only valuable to the degree that it is actually followed.

Sometimes when we come to God for help, His answers are not what we want to hear. There were times the Pharisees were so frustrated with Jesus' answers that they were ready to kill Him. It takes humility to hear and receive a "hard word." Most couples who have come to Rose and me for counseling through the years have come expressly looking for solutions to their marital problems. Many times, however, what we tell them doesn't sit well with them. Some couples are interested only in a temporal fix for their marriage while God is interested in building His kingdom.

In order to overcome the issues and obstacles that lie ahead, you have to commit yourself to doing things God's way. Rose and I have been counseling for nearly 15 years and we are still amazed at the level of resistance we face from Christians who claim to believe the Word of God. In spite of the fact that our counseling is all based in Scripture, it is amazing how often people respond with statements like, "God wouldn't expect

me to do that,” or “That’s not what Dr. So-and-So wrote in his book.” Still others protest, “You don’t understand what I have been through.” It grieves me to hear these kinds of responses, because I know these people are only evading and prolonging what God needs to do for them.

Sometimes professing Christians look at the words of Jesus and conclude that they are either too hard to follow, or too simple to work. Nevertheless, they are the words of the One who spoke the universe into existence. He is the One who sustains all things by His Word; the One who is the wisdom of God; the One who is the way, the truth and the life; and the One who will bring all things into judgment. What could be more important than conforming our lives and marriages to His Word? Whose opinion can we regard above His?

To put it bluntly, marriages fail because people are unwilling to conform their lives to God’s Word. I can tell you that if Rose was determined to take the easy route, we would have ended up in divorce court. There was even a time when I thought divorce was the preferable route. Restoring a marriage is difficult, and the work of restoration nearly always goes against the grain of our natural tendencies. Winning this battle requires people to consistently do things that are uncomfortable.

Yet, if Rose and I had not followed the principles outlined in this book, we would not be where we are today. When we were simply trying to obey the Lord, we had no idea that He would one day use us to help others. We only knew that we needed to be conformed into the likeness of Jesus.

The marriages that we have seen make it through this process are the ones where the couples have embraced the Cross. Please, beloved reader, keep an open mind and a willing heart from the outset; God is calling you to something better than what you can imagine.

Rose and I are continually amazed at the goodness and mercy of God. He has blessed our lives and marriage more than we

ever could have imagined. He is a “more than” God: *more than* able, *more than* willing and *more than* sufficient. He always goes beyond our expectations and there are no limits to His offer of mercy. He is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...” (Ephesians 3:20)

It is our testimony that, if you will follow the principles this book provides, the Lord will do for you what He has done for us!



STUDY GUIDE

Please take your time as you go through this Study Guide, spending at least a week on each chapter. On the practical side, you'll probably want to use a notebook or journal to record your answers and the insights gained as you go through this Study Guide. Also, each spouse should do the questions separately (except in a few instances where the question dictates otherwise). At the end of each week you can share with one another what God has been showing you. On the spiritual side, I ask that you approach each question prayerfully and with an open heart. You will only get as much out of this as you put into it.

Chapter One

1. “Both society and the Church suffer from a lack of understanding about relationships. But God is concerned about relationships and has given us much instruction about how to fulfill His will in relating to Him and others. Relationships are not static things; they are either getting worse or getting better. They take work!” [Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband: Teacher’s Guide*, Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2002, p. 15.] With this in mind:
 - a) Take some time and rate your marriage (see Appendix A).
 - b) Since you recited your vows, has your marriage been getting better or worse? Please explain your response.
2. Before reading the rest of the book, stop, count the cost, and if you are willing, pray a prayer of commitment to believe and obey God’s Word as it is presented in the rest of the book. Also review and sign (together with your spouse, if possible) the Restoring Covenant pledge (see Appendix B).
3. Examine your heart and ask yourself, “Did I come into my marriage with a list of expectations?” If so, make a list of them.
 - a) Review your list of expectations and try to determine what each one is based on. Is it Biblical truth? A selfish desire? A fantasy formed from movies or romance books? A family tradition?
 - b) If the expectation is not from a Biblical truth, are you willing to surrender it to the Lord?
4. Look up the definition of the word “blessed” in the Vine’s dictionary (or a comparable Bible dictionary) and write down its meaning.

5. According to the author, what will begin to happen in the marriage relationship as each spouse starts concentrating on and repenting of their own sin, rather than focusing on the faults of their mate?
6. According to the author, what will produce a fulfilling marriage?
7. Jesus said in Mark 3:25 that “if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.” How would this verse apply to the marital relationship?
8. How does *your* heart need to change toward your spouse if God is to be glorified in your marriage?
9. What is the intent of this book?