



DEALING WITH YOUR MATE'S FATAL FLAWS

by Janet Chester Bly

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Some offenses seem too major to forgive.

Adultery's one.

Assault and battery's another.

You can add to the list.

Even if you forgive (which brings a release to you and contributes to your own well being), severe action such as separation or court may be the smartest, healthiest choice. At least for the time being.



P.A.P. ATTACK: Pray Against Porn. Speak the name of Jesus against the greed and tyranny of lust on behalf of the males in your world. What used to be shunted to magazine racks on the seedy side of town, now's mainstreamed in your face through the internet, satellite and cable. A 'click' reveals salacious images to anyone, anytime, anywhere.

FATAL ATTRACTIONS

What do you do when your man has succumbed to inordinate pride or greed? What if some truth about him hits your world as ugly and jagged as shattered glass?

Addictions can evolve from most any initial interest that becomes an obsession: sports or poker, TV programs or horror movies, video games or surfing the net. Some are consumed with workaholic warps. Or tech distract. Or porn appeal. The lust for more begins with a tiny temptation. Just a few dollars or coins missing. A wink, a

casual touch, or a peek at images. It can start there, but may not stop there. Private desire, unchecked, leads to full-blown surrender of the will.

Addiction has its consequences. An alcoholic ruins his liver. A frequent adulterer contracts an STD. A habitual gambler faces bankruptcy. Old-fashioned sin requires a spiritual solution. Two important questions to ask: "*Why* is this happening?" but also, "*What* should I do now?"

WHEN YOUR MATE REALLY BLOWS IT

Problem solving as a couple involves confrontation, discussion, knowing when to keep silent, and when to take action. If you're still together, you can work on improvements. . .not on him, but on you. No matter what stage you're at in your relationship, you can find something to do that frees you to be your best self.

1.) Listen when you're through lashing out.

In the firestorm of anger, in the pit of deep pain, there's no flicker of wanting to know what it's like for your guy. There's a time to scream, blame, threaten to leave. . .and a time to pay heart-felt, deep attention. To let him tell his side, admit his fault, help you understand. . .and take some small step to forgive. What will you gain by his being totally crushed? Plan on long lunches, late nights, early mornings. Turn off the TV, call in sick to work, cancel the ladies night out.

2.) Form your words with care.

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life. . . .Proverbs 15:4 NKJV
Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.
 Proverbs 16:24 NKJV

The chosen, loving, right words can heal and reconcile warring partners. Part of love is kindness, courtesy, plain old manners. Cruel words deeply wound and can decimate.

3.) Signal your secret signs of love.

Even when he's failed, big time, consider whether you can still offer the habits of your shared love. At the least, the practice of good manners. Or step it up a notch with . . . A knowing touch. A thoughtful deed. Fixing his coffee, his way. Baking his favorite custard. A massage. Demonstration of your love, no matter how enormous the difficulties ahead, can provide comfort and hope, the sinking man's life-support. The neighbors think they know all about your problems, but meet him in the driveway with a hug and kiss. Cancel an activity with a "he needs me, you know." or "I've got to help him work through this."

4.) Stick it out with him.

Live in harmony by showing love for each other. Be united in what you think, as if you were only one person. Don't be jealous or proud, but be humble and consider others more important than yourselves. Care about them as you care about yourselves and think the same way that Christ Jesus thought. . . .

Philippians 2:2-4 (CEV)

Oh, sure, the very thought of it might make you cringe: the little woman who stands by her man—pale, pained, permissive--no matter what he's done. Shades of the old Tammy Wynette country song. But the stats bear out the benefits.

According to an analysis of the National Survey of Families and Households, '86 percent of unhappily married people who stick it out find that, five years later, their marriages are happier.' In fact, nearly 60 percent of those who rated their marriages as unhappy in the late 1980s, and who stayed married, rated the same marriage 'very happy' or 'quite happy' when re-interviewed five years later. It appears that permanent unhappiness is rather rare in marriage. Al Janssen, *The Marriage Masterpiece*, pg.48

It's your choice . . . as you consider the alternatives and possible consequences.

You can explode the scene with a flood of resentment: "I'm not the one who messed things up, but I have to live with it too." "It was all your fault; you go explain it to our family and friends."

Or give yourself time to consider the ramifications before you blurt out the dirt on your mate. Walk a mile or two with him and see if the landscape doesn't change. If you foresee tough love's in your future, give it a chance to sprout from the seeds of your hard-fought history together.

5.) Seek God on his behalf.

The sovereign of heaven majors on outwitting evil by converting it into a profound good. No matter how painful, how humiliating, or tragic, he's able to turn any situation around. But only if you ask, if you seek his help, if you humble yourself to acknowledge you can't do it by yourself. Admit your failure at loving an imperfect man. Confess your own flaws. Give him the whole mess and see what he can do with it.

6.) Help him be accountable.

Be gentle. Realize your own downfalls.

Let him know you're on his side, no matter how this plays out. Then be honest with heart, correct with compassion. Search your own soul too. . .do you bear some responsibility? Could you have prevented some of this? Meditate on your part, but don't take on his own personal failure. He made some choices, let him deal with it. But realize the circumstance may be so unbearable that it may require weeks, months, even years to fess up to the whole story. Allow him his pace, but don't let him off the hook. Aim for complete healing, for him, for you, for the two of you as a couple.

7.) Chart new goals and dreams together.

Unexpected scenarios can crush original plans made for the future. A careless injury. Getting fired. A bad investment. An emotional involvement. Get flexible instead. Look at new opportunities. Consider an alternate route that still includes the two of you. Mess ups happen. Unwise decisions close doors, sometimes permanently. But love and forgiveness can forge other aims that fit as well or better.

8.) Tackle one problem. Confront only one conflict at a time. Talk about it until you've come up with at least one positive action that will ease or solve this dilemma.

9.) Take a look inside. How do you contribute to the problem? Ask for his advice. Receive the criticism and get busy on your own program of change.

10.) Assess the magnitude. Is this a deep-seated, traumatic, long-term affliction? Or is it a temporary malady? Discerning the difference helps create an effective response. If the problem will fade with time, can it be tolerated until it's over? If the difficulty is more permanent, what could help ease the stress? The common cold isn't curable yet, but there's meds available to make the symptoms bearable. Perhaps the same could be true in loving your imperfect man. Look for small actions, words, or ways of thinking that could lessen the overall conflict.

Recall the sweet memories, the good times, the spring and summer times. Is it worth it to persevere until those seasons roll around again? "It's not consensus but commitment that holds us together," says author/songwriter, Gloria Gaither.

To go or stay remains a choice at every juncture of a two-sided relationship, for either partner. In some cases, it's a daily option. If you've resolved to stay, no matter what, tell him. Settle the matter, for both you and him.

11.) Pray that the sins, the attractions, will be stripped of the masks that made them so seductive. His selfish indulgence injured himself and others. May the sordid ugly be exposed for what it is. May he hunger for goodness, for doing right, whatever that takes.



The Anger Factor

Anger deprives you of health and peace. Anger obstructs your view of what God's trying to do. Joni Eareckson explains: "We stop caring, stop feeling. We commit a silent suicide of the soul, and sullen despair moves in like a terrible damp fog, deadening our heart to the hope that we will ever be rescued, redeemed, and happy again." So, what to do with anger? Recognize pride at the core. Control it—reign it in. Ask God for help. Meditate on James 3. Get a good night's sleep. When you're provoked, take at least an hour to simmer down before spouting off. Don't make a major decision when you're mad. Try to never leave your loved one with unresolved anger. Take steps to create a peaceful home environment.

There are good rages though. They're the kind that swing you through the doors of heaven and cause you to stomp up to the throne room, full of honest hunger for justice and closure.



The more you judge him, the more unhappy you'll both be. Look beyond short-term resolutions. A bigger view considers the consequences. Grabbing immediate relief can eclipse the needs of your kids. Have you given up too quickly in loving you you revere? What role model and message would you like to leave behind? Or does that matter at all? What's a God sized pur r imperfect man? Which values and beliefs do pose for your relationship? Commit yourself to some stalwart reasons for the two of you to co-exist. List the invaluable lessons you've gained from this relationship that can help you make a richer, smarter, and more gracious future.

But what if he's doing something you abhor?

Actions beyond the pale demand drastic measures. Here's some suggestions:

Before

the confrontation:

1. Be his best friend. Demonstrate your full support. Prove that you're really on his side. Be there when he needs you. Let him hear you tell the kids and friends how much you love and treasure him. His greatest emotional

need is to feel appreciated and respected.

2. Rely on spiritual resources. Put your faith into open, public practice.
3. Admit your own mistakes. Let him see you're working on your own faults.
4. Tell him when he does something right, looks hot, pleases you.
5. Don't be a whiner, one who nags to the point that he never pays attention anymore.
6. Make sure you have plenty (just right for the both of you) 'him and you' times.

During the confrontation:

1. Tell him why you think a certain action is wrong.
2. Rebuke him with patience and instruction.
3. Expect an explosion, to self-protect what Dr. Henry Brandt calls "psychological nakedness."
4. Assure him that he doesn't have to face this problem alone.
5. Admonish him as a friend, not an enemy.
6. Be careful in your choice of words.
7. Share your concerns, then leave him to his own devices.

After the confrontation:

1. Allow your mate to suffer necessary consequences.
2. Give your mate time to repent.
3. Rejoice together if and when you've worked through the crisis.
4. Forgive, whatever the offense, whichever the final result for you both.

Estranged couples can reconcile.

Fallen spouses can become faithful mates.

It may take a myriad of mazes and honesty matches that pull and tug and stretch the parameters of human love. But one thing's for sure—God must be in it.

A miracle's needed.

Heaven's gotta help.



When conflict becomes abuse: 1. Pray for protection and wisdom. 2. If your life's threatened, leave the home. 3. Let others know about the problem. Create a network of knowing people who will not be surprised when an incident erupts. 4. Communicate your anger in the presence of a third party who can help the listening and hearing process. 5. Determine ahead of time what it will take to cause you to leave. 6. If physical abuse occurs a third time, leave the home. Three times constitutes a pattern. 7. Find a safe place. 8. Go to a doctor for medical treatment and verification. 9. Seek a supportive community. 10. Find a counselor. (taken from Kenneth W. Petersen, "Wife Abuse: The Silent Crime, The Silent Church," *Christianity Today*, November 25, 1988)

*******THE END*******

Do you have a story about how God helped you stay tough but keep on loving your imperfect man after some rough rides? I'd love to hear from you. Tell me what lessons you've learned. Let me know if you would be willing for me to share your account on my website. I'll use only your first name or a pseudonym, if you prefer. Send to janet@blybooks.com and put "Dealing With Mate's Fatal Flaws" in the subject line.

This article was adapted and expanded from *Be Your Mate's Best Friend*, by Stephen and Janet Bly (Moody Press, 1989) and *When Your Marriage Disappoints You*, by Janet Chester Bly (CrisisPoints For Women Series, finalist, ECPA Gold Medallion Award, NavPress, 1990)

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