

INTERVENING WHEN SIN IS DESTROYING A MARRIAGE

Every marriage can be saved. No matter how bad it is, what has happened, or what is happening, every marriage is salvageable. Not just salvageable. It can be made wonderful and loving.

How can we make such a grandiose statement?

Experience.

Our nonprofit ministry, [Family Dynamics](#), meekly began in late 1994. We worked with a few hundred families in 1995, a couple of thousand in 1996, and by the end of 2000 had reached the 50,000 mark. Fifty thousand people isn't an overwhelming number, especially when you consider how many marriages exist, but we believe it's a large enough number to give us credibility.

We know from experience that even those marriages that appear to be the most hopeless really aren't hopeless at all. God can do anything, including changing a relationship between two people who no longer even want the change.

God still works powerfully in the lives of people and can salvage and make wonderful the most hopeless marriage in your church. We've seen it again and again. We've seen it so often that we actually have to consciously keep ourselves from taking it for granted when it happens. To remember to praise God for His mighty power rather than thinking, "Yeah, we expected that."

We would like to share with you some of what we've learned. In this document, we focus specifically on one essential action church leaders must understand and be willing to do if they wish to help hurting couples; we focus on how you can successfully step in to stop a sin destroying a marriage.

Before we start our focused study, we need to point out two things. The first is that any couple in crisis needs calming before they can work on the marriage. The second is that if the marriage is being destroyed by a specific sinful behavior, calming cannot occur until that behavior stops.

When a couple is at each other's throats, or when one or both are involved in behaviors destroying the marriage, the couple must be calmed; they must be moved back from the precipice before any constructive work can be done to salvage the marriage. No amount of explaining, lecturing, teaching, pleading, or anything else gets through to a person when he or she cannot think logically.

The only way to reach the mind is to calm the heart.

Calming a couple doesn't solve their marriage problems: It only brings each person into a state of mind where problems can be solved. Let's repeat that for emphasis: Calming the couple never heals a hurting marriage although it serves as an essential prerequisite that must be accomplished to help a couple in crisis. Try to help a couple in crises without completing this step and you likely will fail. But if you get them from the edge of the precipice and then leave them to work out their problems on their own, your failure will be even worse. Without the immediate implementation of a valid pathway to marital healing, the couple would move rapidly to disaster.



Calming can be accomplished by any knowledgeable person working with the couple, even a person with whom they've had no previous relationship. But that isn't true if all or part of the crisis exists because of an addictive sin practiced by either spouse. That calls for intervention by people who do have a relationship with the couple—such as church leaders.

What do we mean by addiction? We define it as repeated involvement with a person, chemical, or anything else that destroys the relationship between the married couple. The key isn't just that the behavior is repeated but that the repetition makes the marriage unworkable. When this kind of addiction—to a person (adultery), to a chemical (alcohol or any other drug), or to anything else (such as gambling, spousal abuse, etc.)—exists, someone close to the addict must intervene to stop the destructive behavior. Nothing else will work until that occurs. The only marriages that cannot turn around and become what God wants them to be are those where one or both mates refuse to quit the sin destroying the marriage. When the sin stops, the right things can happen to create love and intimacy and commitment. Until it stops, nothing can save them.

That's where you come in. Ministries like [Family Dynamics](#) can help you with calming and all the successive steps to make a marriage wonderful. We can provide you powerful tools and materials and techniques to change marriages. But only you can intervene in the lives of your members and rescue them from their sins.

We wrote this document to offer you a plan of action to show you how to intervene in troubled marriages where the sin of one or both partners is destroying the marriage. We guide you through what to do and how to do it. We can't promise 100% positive results because in the end each person makes his or her own decisions about the future, but we confidently offer a methodology that will work if anything works!



INTERVENTION - INTERRUPTING ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR

It seems hardly a week passes without someone contacting [Family Dynamics](#) to request that we intervene in a troubled marriage. A troubled wife wants us to call her husband and confront him with the effects of his affair. A desperate husband asks if we can somehow get through to his wife who parties every night with her friends, neglecting him and their children. A panicked child wants to know if there is anything we can do to bring his or her parent back from an addiction to pornography to some sense of spiritual balance so the home can be saved.

Our answer to all these people is the same.

No.

No, we won't call the philandering husband, the partying wife, or the porn-addicted parent. Why? Because it would do no good. The person doesn't know us; we have no relationship. If anything, we'll just make it worse as the spiritually blinded person blasts everyone close by because of the intrusion of strangers into his or her business. Intervention can be done only by people who already have a relationship with the person whose behavior needs to be stopped. The good news is that intervention does work.

The bad news is that too many times those who could do it effectively don't do it at all.

WHY IT HAPPENS

When we explain why we can't help in that way, callers invariably ask what to do next. We always recommend that they contact the spiritual leaders of their church. We tell them to ask their minister or other spiritual leaders to visit the struggling spouse or parent and confront him or her with the sin destroying the home. We always say that, but we all too often hear this sad response.

"I've done that. They went one time, told her that they were praying for her and that they were available if needed. We haven't heard from them again."

You can imagine the frustration on both ends of the phone line. We want to help but can't start what we do until a couple is ready for the next step in reducing the crisis—calming.

Knowledgeable strangers can help a couple reduce emotions to a level where they can actually work on their relationship. However, a couple affected by an addictive sin won't be helped by calming unless someone first practices intervention. There has to be someone who loves the addicted sinner enough to do the proper intervention. Actually, someone isn't the proper word. The more accurate phrase is a group of someones.

Why doesn't it happen? Why aren't church leaders fighting tooth and nail to save the marriage? To intervene in the sin?



Church leaders who don't practice useful intervention typically don't because the very need of it usually presents them with anxiety and apprehension. They often fear they don't have enough evidence, enough skill or training, or enough understanding of the situation. Not knowing what to do, they do nothing at all. It isn't that they don't care; the simple fact is that they don't know the pathway. They don't have a valid process. If there were ever a case where inaction is worse than the wrong action, this is it! We understand your fears, doubts, and apprehensions, but the most likely result of doing nothing is that the crisis will escalate and the marriage will end. Hoping for a miracle isn't the godly course of action when church leaders know a couple is in crisis. Being used by God to save the marriage is part of His plan! If shepherds in the kingdom don't act, they can't expect anyone else in the church to act either. If people God placed in positions of leadership do step in to help the marriage, they surely can expect the power of God to be with them.

Please don't let your fear or inexperience stop you. The process is relatively simple and very powerful. You can learn the basics in just a few minutes.

THE PROVEN PROCESS OF INTERVENTION

A group of focused, caring people can intervene in the destructive behaviors of a person they care about, even if the members of the group have no training or experience in intervention. For nearly thirty years that's been proven in dealing with alcoholics and drug addicts. We've developed a similar model that we believe is just as effective in dealing with behaviors destroying a home.

In the early 1960s Vernon E. Johnson developed a model for intervening with chemically dependant people. His book *Intervention: How to Help Someone Who Doesn't Want Help* continues to this day as the classic text for helping . As he developed his system, he fought against the consensus of then current thinking. People, even experts, believed things like: "You can't help someone until he reaches rock bottom" or "You know you can't help someone who doesn't want help." Johnson ignored those prevailing views and forged ahead. He felt that there must be a way to help people who don't want help. He realized that the chemically dependent person remains in that state only because he or she lives in a state of self-delusion. He reasoned that if a focused group of people could break through the alcoholic's or drug addict's rationalizations, they could bring him to a point of lucidity where he would recognize a need for help.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF SELF DELLUSION

We know that the same principles for intervening also hold true for a person caught up in sin, any sin, controlling his or her life. Why?

Because the same process of self-delusion occurs. Unless a person is totally corrupt and just doesn't care what is right or wrong, he must delude himself into believing the sinful behavior either isn't sin or is a much less serious sin than it actually is. Intervention with an alcoholic aims itself at overcoming self-delusions, making the person face the truth about his or her behavior.



Intervention leads the person to the point of accepting help. That process works just as well with someone enmeshed in adultery or addicted to gambling as it does with a person addicted to alcohol or drugs. Break through the self-delusions and you have the opportunity to put the person on the path to recovery.

To understand how to intervene, it is important that one understand two major points about self-delusion. First, the self-deluded person cannot rescue him- or herself from the addictive sin. Second, the self-deluded person is usually very adept at keeping people from effectively dealing with his sins by adroitly diverting them to dealing with his delusions.

That's why we explain below the four phases of self-delusion to you. We don't intend to make you experts—it isn't necessary that you understand all the psychology or nuances—but only need to make you aware of what the process is. A person with average people skills can master intervention when equipped with an awareness of how the addicted sinner operates.

THE FIRST PHASE OF DELUSION - RATIONALIZATION

Rationalization is an unconscious process that keeps a person from feeling bad about his or her actions. Of necessity, the person doesn't recognize the rationalizations because recognizing that he is rationalizing means that he can't rationalize any longer. As Johnson wrote, "First, all people rationalize when their behavior has caused them some kind of legitimate discomfort. This is the function of rationalization: to help us feel better about ourselves when we have done something of which we're not especially proud. Second, all rationalizations must be unconscious in order to work. We cannot be aware that we're rationalizing as we're doing it; in fact, the more aware we are, the less successful our rationalization will be." (Johnson, page 25)

Self-delusion differs from normal rationalization in that when a normal rationalization is confronted, "a dose of the facts is usually enough to bring him or her back through the rationalization to reality." But in self-delusion, "rationalization becomes integral to his or her life. Every [inappropriate] behavior is rationalized away, and the person is swept further and further from reality and further into delusion ... The intellect continues to suppress the emotions and defend against reason until the truth is buried beyond reach." A kind of pathological mental mismanagement takes over. "The more the individual believes in his or her own rationalizations, the further into delusion he or she goes." (Johnson, page 26)

Sound bad? It will get worse.

Rationalization is only the first phase of self-delusion. The person convinces himself on a conscious level that his actions aren't wrong, no matter what anyone says, but on the subconscious level something quite different happens. "His bad feelings about himself have been locked in at the unconscious level by a secure, high, and seamless wall of rational defenses. This is why he can believe what to everyone else seems patently unbelievable. Because of the wall, he cannot get at those bad feelings about himself. He is not even aware that they exist. But they are, nevertheless, chronically present in the form of a free-floating mass of anxiety, guilt, shame, and remorse." (Johnson, page 31) Without intervention, those negative emotions lead to the next phase.



THE SECOND PHASE OF DELUSION - PROJECTION

The free-floating negative emotions caused by intense rationalization need some outlet. Usually they express themselves by attacking others. The deluded sinner attacks spouse, children, parents, friends, church leaders, church members, authors, or anyone else who gets in his or her path.

Naturally, a common projection is to blame the entire problem on the spouse. “If he had only . . .” or “Nobody could live with someone like him . . .” When others respond to those attacks—either to agree or disagree—they only make the projected charges more real to the deluded person. Responding to his projections helps him convince himself that he is right; it is all his spouse’s fault. Those who agree give credence. Those who disagree harden him in his position as he battles to convince them.

The most vitriolic attacks aren’t always directed at the spouse. They usually aim themselves at anyone who tries to convince the sinner that his or her actions are sinful or that he or she should stop the sinful behavior. He quickly assigns them evil motives and/or evil actions and responds emotionally in proportion to the threat he perceives from them. He sees the spouse who begs him to come home and work out the marriage as conniving, self-serving, and uncaring. “Yeah, you want me home now? Well what about the way you’ve treated me in the past? Why would anyone believe that I should stay married to you after you’ve . . .” He sees church leaders who try to convince him to stop the sin as controlling, unqualified because of their own sins, or heretics. “Those people don’t really care about me. All they care about is controlling the people in their precious little church. And how does so-and-so think he could ever have the right to say anything to anyone after he . . .” He sees his children as brainwashed, pawns of the spouse, and unaware. “You don’t know it now, but you’ll be much better off after the divorce. You just aren’t thinking clearly. After all, I know you’ll be happier not to have to live in the misery our home has been while your Mom and I were fighting every day . . .”

While these projections appear to be mean and spiteful, the self-deluded person sees them as vindicated and just. Just as rationalization must be an unconscious act to benefit the self-deluded, so must projection. He actually believes he is “standing up for himself” or even, in extreme cases, “standing for the truth of God!” (We often see a sinner rationalizing his behavior by yanking various scriptures to justify himself and/or to condemn those who try to intervene. In these cases, the sinner usually seeks out other Christians who will justify his position—there is always someone out there who will—and tries to evoke a battle between his recruited gladiators and those brethren who love him enough to try to stop him.)

When responded to in the same spirit or tone he or she manifests, the sinner becomes more adamant and more focused in his attacks. The defense of self becomes part of the delusion. Now the “addict” can focus on another person (or group of people) instead of having to deal with self, giving even more power to the delusion within. The “fight” with them keeps him from having to “fight” with himself. Wise church leaders refuse to fight with him or any sympathizer he recruits. Argument isn’t intervention, as you will see. But after a while even projection isn’t enough for the sinner. If intervention doesn’t occur now, the delusion evolves to the next phase.



THE THIRD PHASE OF DELUSION - REPRESSION

The sinful behavior controlling the person tends to escalate during Phase Two, leading to more involvement in the sin that moves the person into the more dangerous Phase Three.

Whatever the level of actual sinful actions, the person moves past self-imposed barriers and violates personally held values. That puts her in an impossible position because she can't live with herself if she continually violates her belief system. The stresses of her own inconsistency will lead her to a kind of personality "meltdown" as well as overwhelm her with guilt, shame, confusion, and a host of other negative emotions. She must do something to reduce that self-conflicted stress.

Past rationalizations begin to unravel but unless she's become completely corrupt she can't emotionally afford to abandon them. She sticks to her arguments and justifications for her behavior but they aren't enough anymore. She has to find a new way to cope with her sin. Without awareness of what she is doing, she moves into Phase Three—Repression. "They literally shut it out of their minds. They continue to rationalize some of their behaviors (those they can bear to face), and they repress those they cannot rationalize . . . Like rationalization, repression is a human survival skill. None of us could endure the memory of every shameful or embarrassing moment we've experienced during our entire lives; the sheer enormity would overwhelm us. When a normal person represses a specific memory, it is usually of no great consequence, since the behavior that led to the memory is unlikely to be repeated. But when [an addict] represses, it is because those actions that produced the pain and shame have occurred more than once and are likely to recur and worsen with the passage of time . . . It works to push [the addict] deeper into the [delusion] until the truth becomes virtually unattainable—unless it is brought back forcibly through intervention or a fortuitous grouping of crises." (Johnson, page 45)

The addicted sinner still justifies his or her actions, but in Phase Three some actions just aren't justifiable, even in his or her well-woven rationalizations. Every action he or she can no longer justify now just disappears from memory. She doesn't remember doing anything or saying anything contrary to her values. It isn't that she can't remember, that she's had some kind of physically induced amnesia. The "amnesia" comes from completely psychological origins. She chooses not to remember, but the choice isn't made with the conscious mind; it's made in the subconscious. She's keeping herself from facing her own contradictions. Intervention at this point becomes more difficult but not impossible. The job of intervention is to make those repressed actions reappear and to reappear with powerful results. Before we tell you how to do that, we examine the last phase of self-delusion.

THE FOURTH PHASE OF DELUSION - ALTERED MEMORY

Nearly every person who reaches marital crisis rewrites marital history. Events from the past get interpreted differently. For example, it isn't unusual to hear, "I never loved her. I'm not sure why I married her but I know that I never did love her." Why would a person rewrite history? To justify current actions.

If one can convince himself that his spouse has always been a bad mate, or that life has been a man-made hell for years, or that his spouse is totally impossible to live with, then it's easy to rationalize that leaving that spouse isn't a sin; it's survival! No wonder those justifying themselves nearly always



alter memories. Altered memories give credence to current rationalizations.

A person in Phase Four doesn't alter memory about just the distant past: they've reached a stage of self-delusion that alters memories of things that happened recently. It's the next logical step after Repression. If he can't forget an act, he alters the interpretation of what happened so that it justifies the act.

From people in Phase Four we've heard things like, "No one in my church cares about me. Not one of them has even bothered to try to contact me!" when we knew absolutely that someone from their church spoke with them just days before. No, they aren't lying. They really believe what they're saying is true. They've reached the fourth stage of delusion where they have to change actual occurrences to justify their behaviors. Their rewriting of history is completely subconscious but it serves its purpose well. It continues to insulate the sinner from the guilt and shame of his own actions.

Nothing his spouse did in the last few months—maybe even years—carries anything but negative memories. That negative history justifies leaving her. Likewise, interactions with friends or church leaders take on a different light. The conversation yesterday with a buddy or a minister isn't remembered as "I care about you and want to help" but as "You dirty so-and-so, why don't you just curl up and die!" Why? Because it's easier to disregard the rantings of a mean-spirited enemy than the genuine concerns of a caring friend. Even in this stage of self-delusion, the addicted sinner can still be rescued. The process, of course, is intervention.

NOW THAT YOU UNDERSTAND SOMETHING ABOUT THE ADDICTED SINNER'S SELF DELUSION

Now that you understand that addicted sinners are self-deluded, perhaps you will stop expecting them to come to their senses. You'll let go of the notion that you could help them if they would just quit lying. You'll forget that old, terribly wrong concept that there's nothing anyone can do until the addicted sinner wants help. Addicted sinners can't want help because they can't allow themselves to admit that what they're doing is sin! Because addicted sinners are self-deluded, they don't know they're lying. Their delusions make them believe everything they're saying is true. That means that they cannot help themselves and they will not overcome their capturing sin without help from someone who loves them and who isn't deluded about their sin. That is why it is very crucial that church leaders intervene. The spouse cannot do it alone. It takes a group and that group must understand what is happening.

Also, now that you understand the phases of self-delusion, you won't allow yourself to be sidetracked by them. You'll know not to let the addicted sinner goad you into an argument or debate. You'll know not to believe—and therefore, be discouraged by—statements like "I never loved her" or "Do you know what she did?" You'll keep on task to rescue the sinner from his sinful ways without allowing him to focus on the wrong things.

You'll never accept his or her interpretation of anything, not even what happened yesterday, because you know that he or she must alter history to justify current behavior. And you'll know that there are things just under the surface, being repressed, that if you can bring to light you can use to momentarily stop the sinner from his or her sin so that you can set them on a path of spiritual and marital healing.

That, as you recall, is the whole purpose of intervention.

Remember, intervention doesn't stop the sin; it leads the person to a point of admitting her own self-delusion, that, as a result, will lead her to accept the next step in overcoming the sin. Properly done intervention breaks through the rationalization, leading to a period of lucidity where the person is willing to find help to stop the sin.

ILLUSTRATING THE FOUR PHASES

If you feel you have a good enough grasp of the four phases of self-delusion to understand why the addicted sinner does them and to know not to let her lure you into reacting to her rationalizations, you may want to skip this illustration section. We'd rather you be comfortable with the concepts and act than to become immersed in their intricacies and not act. Nevertheless, we know that some folks like specific illustrations of principles they're learning. For that reason, we illustrate in this small section how an addicted sinner might evolve through the four phases.

While we could choose any number of sins to illustrate how self-delusion works, the most common addictive sin we encounter in our work at FDI is an adulterous relationship. Most continuing adulterous relationships didn't start out with the intention of becoming adulterous. (For a detailed discussion of how "affairs" occur, including the three kinds of affairs and how they differ, see *Becoming ONE* by Joe Beam. Howard Publishing.) Our experience in working with thousands of couples shows that the most common source for a paramour is from couples who are best friends. The second most common source is with a fellow employee. In both situations the relationship usually begins in innocuous ways and gradually grows to sinful proportions. No defense barriers erect themselves because neither person sees danger until it is too late. By then, they don't want any defenses. They move into Phase One—Rationalization—as fulfilled needs and desires drive each subconsciously to find ways to justify the relationship. Sentiments like the following, either spoken or mentally rehearsed countless times, provide the budding sinner a kind of justification for the sin:

- "My spouse doesn't understand me"
- "God wanted us to be together so we could be happy"
- "You don't know what it was like living in that marriage"
- "I've studied my Bible and come to the conclusion that I'm not really married to my current spouse!"

Instead of being surprised to hear rationalizations, expect them. How could otherwise godly people sin repeatedly if they couldn't find some way to rationalize the behavior?

As they move into Phase Two—Projection—the interaction between the addicted sinner and her lover intensifies. As she projects her subconscious negative feelings onto others, the addicted sinner eliminates relationships with friends and family, either reacting to their negative view of her situation or fearing they will negatively react in the future. Because of disengaging those significant people from her life, the addicted sinner feels a need to be closer to her lover. If the affair hasn't been overtly sexual to this point, it now takes on a physical dimension. For some it doesn't evolve yet to sexual intercourse, but it definitely moves past actions that the person could justify as holy and good.



If the adulterous relationship has already turned sexual, an interesting transition often occurs at this point. Most long-lived adulteries began as friendships, which means the strongest aspect to the relationship involves emotional bonding. As a person moves into the latter stages of Phase Two and the beginning stages of Phase Three, the emotional part of the adultery often becomes secondary to the sexual aspect. That happens because different needs are now being fulfilled by her sexual encounters with her lover. Instead of providing a sense of warmth, closeness, and intimacy, their physical union evolves into an intense “you and me against the world” fantasy. Although this kind of sexual interaction is not as fulfilling in a romantic sense, she finds herself craving it. It provides an escapism from reality because she has a sense of being encapsulated with her lover, separate from the real world around her. Her escalating involvement becomes so intense that the addicted sinner can no longer rationalize all her actions. She must move into Phase Three—Repression. Her claim to herself that “this isn’t about sex” loses some of its persuasiveness as sex finally becomes a primary factor in the relationship. If her life spirals out of her rationalized control, she may move rapidly from her original values and morals. The breach caused by the adultery widens to include other sins. She may start drinking, change her appearance and lifestyle, or participate in sexual activities that she previously viewed as taboo.

When that happens, those changes may alter her into a different person, unlike anything she has ever been or thought she would be. Of course, those changes in her also affect her relationship with her lover. She and the lover may start to argue or disagree. The affair itself may be endangered, though no church leader should sit back expecting it just to end on its own in the not too distant future. Affairs that self-destruct usually self-destruct slowly.

Phase Three evolves into Phase Four—Altered History. The addicted sinner’s transgressions exist only in favorable light: “God’s forgiven me for what I’ve done” or “I only did that because of how difficult it is to live with you.” Her memories of the spouse’s shortcomings carry a much different hue: “You’ve done so much damage to me” or “If everyone knew how you really are.”

The most fascinating part of this phase is the altered memory of sinful acts. She may remember last night’s sexual encounter as only holding and kissing. Think that’s impossible? We’ve seen even more bizarre altered memory from adulterous couples. For example, she may have no memory of the tremendous argument she and her lover had when they last sneaked off together. All she remembers is how she felt being with him—protected, secure, loved— even if nothing that transpired in that rendezvous communicated any of those feelings.

We’ve seen adulterous relationships break apart where one paramour couldn’t stand the degeneration into constant arguments and insults while the other paramour remembers little to nothing of bad things happening while they were together.

This deluded adulterer has no hope of rescue unless godly people intervene and intervene quickly.



DECIDING TO INTERVENE IN THE DELUSION

We hope we've convinced you to intervene in the lives of addicted sinners before they reach "bottom." You have opportunity to save them, and their families, from further damage if you act now. Wait too long and you'll have no chance at all. The key is to act NOW. Every day you wait makes the situation worse, allowing another phase of delusion to take over or to become stronger. Waiting only hurts more people and brings the sinner closer to the edge where he or she can't be reached at all.

You don't need extensive training, weeks of preparation, or lots and lots of time to digest the situation. You do need to act just as soon as humanly possible to rescue the addicted sinner before he or she commits those acts which cannot be undone—things like divorce, marriage to a lover, or driving off a bridge in a moment of despair. We urge you to act now, using the love in your heart and the simple steps we list for you here. Dr. Johnson's brief books have led many "laymen" to intervene successfully in the addictions of alcoholics and drug addicts. These principles should work just as well for you as you intervene with adulterers, addicted gamblers, and other addicted sinners.

If you simply must have a professional guide you, there are intervention trained counselors and therapists in many cities. If you contract the services of one, just make sure that his or her values and beliefs are compatible with yours. You certainly don't want to be in the middle of an intervention meeting and have the professional say something like, "Well, I personally don't see anything wrong with what you're doing but these good folks do."

Right this very moment, will you pray, asking God what He would have you do about addicted sinners you know? Ask Him if He would rather you not act and wait to see what happens with an addicted sinner. Ask Him would He instead want you, as a shepherd in His church, to tend His sheep in their hour of travail? Of course, you already know what He would say in reply. He wrote His answer a long time ago:

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1)

"My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins." (James 5:19-20)

Don't let God down by failing the people He put in your charge.



INTERVENTION MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A PATH TO MARITAL HEALING

We assume from this point on in this document that you will proceed with the intervention, believing that God expects that of you. Just before we tell you the process, we must make clear one very important point that we've only alluded to before. Intervention isn't the solution for the couple's problems, but the solution can never be applied without the intervention! Intervention must take place to stop the sin and then, immediately, a process for saving the marriage must be implemented. Intervention interrupts the sin; it doesn't solve the marital problem.

In his model for dealing with alcoholics, Johnson goes so far as to say that if you intend to intervene with the addict but haven't any resources or pathway to healing to offer at the conclusion of the intervention, forget the intervention. You may temporarily stop the person from drinking or drugging, but without a path to healing, the drinking or drugging eventually begins again. You'd be better off to leave them alone in the first place than to intervene and then leave them alone. It's like Jesus said about the man freed from a demon.

"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first." (Matthew 12:43-45)

Stopping the sin isn't enough. Something must happen to move God into the person's life to fill in the emptiness left by the departing evil. Intervention isn't treatment; it's simply intervention. It stops the person long enough to give you time to get them doing the right things to solve the problem. It's similar to the story Jesus told about casting out the demon. You can't leave the house empty; you must now do the positive things to help the person grow to where he or she should be in relationship to God. We believe that principle is crucial in dealing with addicted sinners, especially those in marital crisis. Ending the sin doesn't save the marriage, but it does accomplish the first step. It brings the couple into a state where the marriage can be saved.

That's important to think about before you begin the intervention process. You need to know the pathway to healing that you'll offer a couple when you convince the addicted sinner to stop his or her destructive behavior and to work on saving their marriage. Several tools are available from many sources. We at Family Dynamics have several options to offer. We'll gladly share with you a pathway to marital healing and happiness for couples in crisis as well as ways to strengthen good marriages into great marriages. We exist as a nonprofit corporation to provide tools your church can use to help families. If you wish to use our tools as a pathway for a couple when you encounter that "moment of lucidity," we recommend the following:

- We offer a powerful three-day seminar called *A New Beginning* for troubled couples.

We encourage you to send any couple in marital crisis to this seminar—even if they don't have any desire to save the marriage! Time and again we see what appear to be absolutely hopeless marriages turned around in three days. God continually blesses these special three-day seminars beyond our expectations.

(Go to www.familydynamics.net or call (800) 650-9995 to learn more.)



- Because no short-term seminar changes behavior for the long term, we recommend you conduct our eight week classes at your church. In these special, interactive classes, not only will you change the marriage of the couple you sent to *A New Beginning*, you will also strengthen and bless the marriages of other couples in your church as well, keeping them from crisis. How do you have these classes in your church? We offer intense training workshops for couples in your church who want to help marriages. We'll teach them how to conduct two unique and effective interactive marriage courses in your church. Choose two or three strong couples from your church who have a burden for helping marriages, and send them to a three day Facilitator Training Program right away.

Whether you use the tools we offer or use other tools, give the couple the right direction and the right resources to heal their marriage. We've discovered that it takes seven steps to evolve an awful marriage into a great marriage. For good marriages to become great marriages, only four steps are needed. Like any ministry working in marriages, we've developed specialized tools for churches that help couples through specific steps. Whoever you choose to aid you in your working with families, we suggest that you choose a resource organization that offers tools for couples at various stages rather than a "one size fits all." It takes a little more work but the results are astounding.

PERFORMING THE INTERVENTION

Continuing to base our model on Dr. Johnson's, we now share with you how to do the actual intervention.

We mentioned earlier that the process is simple. It is. But don't confuse simple with fast or effortless. The methodology requires a few hours of preparation and calls for some very specific actions, some of which may seem slightly tedious. Don't let that deter you. Someone said we Americans are the only people who stand in front of a microwave oven and scream, "Hurry!" Don't let that kind of impatience affect you in this mission. The intervention process isn't a microwave process, accomplished in a matter of minutes. It takes good old human concern, preparation, and action. All told, it takes only a few hours from beginning to end but during those hours you will work, think, and pray intensely.

Just remember that the process works. It's been proven with thousands of chemically dependant people. Don't shortchange it just to save time or you may fail. In its simplest form, intervention is presenting reality in a receivable way to the person out of touch with it. Intervention breaks down the defenses long enough for truth to shine through. As we've emphasized, it isn't the solution but it gets a person to the point of being willing to seek the solution.

Presenting reality means presenting specific facts about the addicted sinner's behavior and the consequences that have happened or will happen because of that behavior.

The intervention must be objective, unequivocal, and caring. While intervention is confrontational by nature, it isn't punishment. Let God do the punishing. Your job is to use the methods available to you to break through the person's self-delusion so that he or she can see clearly what is happening.

Intervention involves six steps.

FIRST, GATHER THE TEAM

Intervening with an addicted sinner isn't done "just between the two of you" as described in Matthew 18. Jesus gave that us that process to use when someone sins against us personally. The addicted sinner may be affecting you with his or her sin, but it isn't just you that he or she sins against. The very nature of his or her sin moves you past the individual part of Matthew 18 and into the "take others along" stage. Because of the addictive nature of the sin, the chances of successful intervention diminish dramatically if you approach him or her without taking others with you. To break through the delusion, a team of concerned people will likely do far better than a concerned Christian working alone.

Make a list of people who surround the addicted sinner—employer, supervisor, parents, mate, children, close friends, coworkers, spiritual leaders, and the like. Pray over the list, seeking to find the right people, and then recruit a group of three to five strong team members. (Dr. Johnson says that a team of three to five is the most effective.) Don't fret too long over this, trying to build a perfect team. As long as each team member meets the following criteria, you'll do okay.

- Each should have some type of relationship with the addicted sinner that is being negatively affected by the addicted sinner's actions. It may be a kinship, a spiritual relationship, a friendship, an employer-employee relationship, etc. The more important the relationship, the more effective this person likely will be on the team. (For example, a son or daughter carry a strong probability of being more effective than a casual acquaintance.)
- Each team member must be willing to risk the relationship with the addicted sinner.
- Each must be emotionally adequate to do the intervention. The team should have no person who will cower emotionally if the sinner initially reacts negatively to the intervention. Neither should the team have a member who will become angry and start attacking—verbally or otherwise—the sinner if he responds poorly.
- Each should be a person that you anticipate will understand self-delusion as described above.
- Each team member should have specific knowledge of unacceptable behavior on the part of the addicted sinner or specific knowledge of a negative consequence the addicted sinner will face if he or she continues to pursue the sin.

Your list may include non Christians if they hold to the same spiritual values as you and if they believe the addicted sinner's actions are wrong and destructive. Why would you

include a non Christian? We'll give an example. What if the addicted sinner is committing adultery and her employer is considering firing her because the affair is causing detriment to the company? Adding the employer to the team gives you a person who can clearly explain negative consequences of continuing in the sinful behavior. As you will see, that is very important to intervention. Be sure to use spiritual wisdom if you consider recruiting a non Christian. A non Christian in a position of influence in the addicted sinner's life can be very effective in the intervention, but don't approach him or her unless you know his or her values and beliefs. You don't want to make the mistake the Corinthians made when they took their problems with each other to ungodly judges. (1 Corinthians 6:1-5)



The idea is to save the sinner, not embarrass the community of believers or the addicted sinner. Once you've recruited the team, educate them on the four phases of self-delusion by sharing this document with them and discussing the phases. You can do that individually but you'll likely use your time more wisely if you gather the team for this brief education. It's not important that you or they understand all the nuances of the phases—just that you grasp the two basic points we made about them. Remember the crucial points?

- The self-deluded person is incapable of extricating him- or herself from the controlling sin.
- You should not let the addicted sinner's rationalizations and defenses cause you to lose your focus during the intervention.

You will ignore rewritten histories, smooth explanations, hostile projections, and the like. As long as you and the rest of the team understand that about the delusions, you'll do fine. The addicted sinner won't be able to get you off track.

SECOND, GATHER THE TRACK RECORD

Because the addicted sinner cannot see that he or she is sinning, the intervention team must be prepared to convince him or her of that sin. Approaching the sinner with generalities or platitudes will not work. The information with which to confront him must be specific incidents or consequences. They must be facts that will cause him to admit—even momentarily—his sinful behavior.

Let's illustrate with an adultery example. Suppose a man were to rationalize his relationship with his paramour by claiming that it has no sexual dimension, that they are only very close friends and will continue in that relationship until they are both divorced. Any fact that disproves his claim becomes pertinent. Suppose that his daughter followed him one night and saw him park in front of his paramour's apartment. Several hours later he emerged and drove away. That is a specific fact that he cannot deny because a reputable witness (his daughter) recorded the event. While that one incident might be met with an explanation ("Oh, we were just talking. She was depressed and needed a friend. Nothing happened."), an abundance of similar examples from credible witnesses can overpower his deluded explanations.

Remember, he believes his rationalizations and explanations. He's not allowing himself to confront his own adulterous act. He's repressing the sinfulness of the act and keying totally on his projection that others just don't understand him or his situation. As long as he can offer plausible explanations or attack others, he doesn't have to face his own behaviors that he knows are wrong. The intervention team overpowers those delusions by offering fact after fact after fact. The more examples the team has, the better equipped the team will be. They operate almost like lawyers in a TV drama, building a case of strong circumstantial evidence if they don't have "smoking gun" type evidence. In our example of adultery, phone records, sightings in other locales or cities, unexplained

disappearances, even the proverbial lipstick on the collar, all combine to make specific charges. When irrefutable proof of sin exists—so called smoking gun evidence—use it without hesitation. If his wife, for example, had hired a private detective and had incriminating pictures, those pictures become pertinent "facts" to be used in the intervention.



This next step might appear tedious but you'll regret it if you bypass it. To do an intervention properly, every fact—circumstantial or otherwise—must be written on paper before the actual intervention. There are two categories to be written. The first has to do with evidence of the sinful behavior. Each member of the team must write down what he or she will say during the intervention, using information that he or she personally witnessed. An exception can be made for church leaders who haven't personally witnessed the behaviors. They can bring a list of specific statements from others not on the intervention team. But any statement they read must be specific and signed.

As team members write what they will say, they write in the second person, "you did this specific act." The written statements should be as explicit as possible, describing a particular incident. Statements gathered from others to be read at the intervention by church leaders must also follow this format. Remember, no generalizations. Everything must be in unsparing detail. "I saw you kiss her" instead of "I thought you were being a little too familiar." The addicted sinner will dismiss every generalization; he or she has a much more difficult time dismissing specific and detailed facts.

The second category has to do with consequence. Each person should write specifically what the consequences already have been or will be if the person continues in this behavior. For example, a daughter might say, "Dad, if you persist in your relationship with this woman, I will no longer have anything to do with you. I won't come to your wedding if you marry her. You won't be welcome at my graduation or any other important event in my life. When I get married, I won't want you there. Don't think that time will change this and I'll forgive and forget. I won't. You're hurting me on purpose and I can't let that happen without telling you what it will cost in our relationship." Of course, she shouldn't say anything that she doesn't feel or that she won't do. Any idle threats at this point will only backfire. She should state exactly what the consequences will be as she believes them in her heart.

If one of the interveners is an employer, she might say something like, "Charlie, what you're doing shows a lack of integrity and that causes our company a severe problem. We trust you with thousands of dollars but how can I do that when you can't be trusted to be faithful to your wife? Besides, the PR damage you're doing in the community is hurting us.

Either you quit this nonsense and work things out with your wife or I'll have to let you go." We realize that for many employees, such a statement would never take place. But we know of real life examples where employers have let addicted sinners go because of extramarital affairs. If rather than simply firing them, they had been part of an intervention team, we believe they may have stopped the adulterous affairs. If an employer is part of the team, ask what consequences he can truthfully state to the addicted sinner.

Of course, church leaders on the team must be prepared to make a similar statement about the consequences of the addicted sinner's relationship with the church if he continues in the sin. Remember that these aren't statements to be made vindictively or angrily. If they come across as punishment, self-righteousness, or condemnation, the addicted sinner will resort to his or her defensiveness. When they are made lovingly and as a matter of unavoidable consequence if the person persists in the sin, they can have a different impact altogether. Try to write these statements as explicitly and lovingly as Jesus would.

Usually a church leader leads the intervention team. As the leader, he will make a clear charge of sin and a clear call to action at the close of the intervention. This call is based on a totality of the evidence presented by the others. But he, too, must write down what he will say at the intervention in his closing charge and call. That is crucial! As part of his closing charge and call, the church leader must be



ready to give a path to healing if the addicted sinner experiences a moment of spiritual lucidity. The purpose of the intervention is to cause that moment. Don't let it escape when it occurs. There must be a clear and written path to healing that the leader immediately explains to the addicted sinner. Not only does he explain it, he urges the sinner to commit on the spot to follow it.

THIRD, REHEARSE THE INTERVENTION

Have at least one meeting where the team brings together their written statements. Designate a chairperson who will lead the intervention (usually a church leader). His job is to prevent the intervention from jumping track and disintegrating into an argument with the addicted sinner.

During the rehearsal each member reads each of his or her statements aloud to the group. After each statement, the group either approves or amends the statement as needed. They are making sure that every written statement is devoid of antagonism, generalizations, and subjective opinions. The presence of any of those will give the addicted sinner a way to divert the intervention to a debate.

The chair decides what order each person will go in during the intervention. Nothing is left to chance and nothing is done off the cuff. Everything is planned to perfection. Once the statements have been read and amended as needed, the rehearsal of the actual intervention takes place. During the rehearsal everyone in the group takes turns playing the part of the addicted sinner. As each member reads his or her statements to the "sinner" he responds in every possible way that he can imagine the real addict might respond. He will offer excuses, try to derail the intervention by projecting, try to start arguments, try to misuse scripture, deny that certain things occurred, and the like. With each reaction from the "sinner" the group discusses and decides what the best response to that dodge should be

and who should make the response. For example, they may decide that the daughter is the one who replies, "Dad, don't expect me to believe that you would be in a woman's house from midnight to 3 a.m. just to make her feel better. I know you're a loving and kind man. But a loving and kind man wouldn't be in that apartment at those hours because he would know his family would be at home in great pain and distress. You went there for some reason so compelling that it led you to hurt us." On the other hand the group may decide the daughter shouldn't respond with that statement but that the church leader should instead. Every response must be thought of and written down, noting which person on the intervention team will give it.

As you conduct the rehearsal, have each person at some point play the part of the "sinner." As you change from one intervener to the other, change the person playing the "sinner." This method will prepare you for nearly any response you might receive when the real intervention takes place.

FOURTH, FINALIZE THE DETAILS

You may choose to do as many as two or three rehearsals. Don't do more than that and don't let the entire rehearsal process take more than a week. Every day you wait to intervene makes the intervention more difficult. From the time the team first meets for your "educational" meeting until the time they actually do the intervention, no more than two weeks should elapse. If you have one educational meeting and two meetings to rehearse what you've written and answering possible dodges, you will have met only three times. For most teams that's enough. Squeeze that into two weeks and then get on with rescuing the addicted sinner.

Decide the date, time, and place for the intervention. Decide who will get the addicted sinner there and what method he or she will use. Know who will go first, who follows, and the like. Know who will give each response to anticipated reactions. Know who will give the response to any unanticipated reaction. Set every detail and then make them happen.

FIFTH, DO THE INTERVENTION

Sometimes people ask if they should tell the addicted sinner what the meeting is about. Would it be deceitful to ask him or her to a meeting and then surprise him or her with the intervention? Some feel that everything should be explained in the invitation. More experienced interveners say that an up-front explanation like that ensures that the sinner won't show. Their experience says that one of the team members should have a legitimate reason to request a meeting with the addicted sinner. When the addicted sinner arrives, the intervention team is already in the room, usually to the sinner's surprise. At that point the person who asked the addicted sinner to come explains what is about to happen. He then tells the addicted sinner that he will meet with him about the other matter later, and asks with full sincerity and expectation that the addicted sinner stay to hear what these people who love him have to say.

Do the intervention just as rehearsed. The chair keeps everyone on track and keeps the discussion from disintegrating or degenerating. He makes sure that everyone goes in order and reads their statements just as rehearsed. He also sees to it that every response is dealt with as practiced. He ensures that any unexpected response is handled thoroughly and lovingly without letting it get the meeting off track.

Of course, the prayer that went into the preparation for this meeting will bring the wisdom of God, as He promised. Bathe the process in prayer from beginning to end and the results should be that the person finally has a moment of spiritual lucidity.

How will you be able to tell if the addicted sinner experiences lucidity? The best indication is a heartfelt confession of sin. If you break through his or her self-delusion and the sinner finally comes face-to-face with his or her sinfulness, he or she will be broken. When Nathan confronted David, forcing him to see his self-delusions and admit the heinousness of his sin, David's heart broke. We read his plaintive cry to God in Psalm 51. He called on God to "have mercy," to "blot out my transgressions," and to wash away all my iniquity." Toward the end of his song begging God's forgiveness, he wrote:

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

If the addicted sinner you confront with loving intervention reacts finally with a broken spirit and heart like David, you know that you have the moment of lucidity. Don't let that moment pass without taking full advantage of it to help the sinner. As soon as it occurs, the chair immediately offers the path to healing and gets the addicted sinner's agreement to follow it. That path must be specific, must be workable, and must begin soon. The very act of confession starts a healing and freeing process that will be completed as he or she follows the prescribed path of healing. Confession brings his or her sin to light, making him or her see it for what it is, what it has done, and what it is doing. His vulnerability caused by honest confession means that the addicted sinner now can be ministered to by those Christians around him who love him. As Bonhoffer wrote in *Life Together*:

“[when] the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders . . . Confession in the presence of brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride . . . [by confession] our brother breaks the circle of self-deception. A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself.”

The addicted sinner most likely needs spiritual help and part of the path of healing must include a plan to develop him or her spiritually. Someone needs to pay special attention to his or her learning, praying, and growing in the Lord Jesus. In the same way, since the continuing sin affected his or her marriage, someone must pay special attention to healing that relationship. As mentioned, we and other ministries stand ready to assist. Before we leave this point, allow us to make one final observation. Sometimes it is possible to start a person on the pathway without confession. By that we mean that they generally acknowledge that there is a problem but they aren't ready to yet specifically confess sin. There is tremendous value in specifically confessing sin and if the person shows brokenness, we recommend that you gently nudge him or her into concrete confession of specific sin.

“Confession should deal with concrete sins. People usually are satisfied when they make a general confession. But one experiences the utter perdition and corruption of human nature, in so far as this ever enters into experience at all, when one sees his own specific sins . . . otherwise it might happen that one could still be a hypocrite even in confessing to a brother.” (Bonhoffer)

While that is the best reaction—the one that you should pray for, plan for, and push for—there is still a course of action for the addicted sinner who cannot be that honest in the intervention. If he or she is willing to begin the pathway of healing—both in his relationship with his spouse and his relationship with God—by all means start him on the journey. Confession still needs to come somewhere along the line. If it doesn't, it is unlikely that he or she will restore intimacy with God or with the church. It is also very unlikely that he or she will restore intimacy with his or her mate. But the specific confessions can come later, while the person is on the pathway of learning, changing, and healing. What's important right now is that he or she agrees to start on the pathway. It's far better to have a half-broken person seeking healing for his spiritual life and marriage than to have a self-deluded person continuing on a path of uninterrupted sin.

Therefore, the ideal goal for intervention is a moment of complete lucidity where specific confession comes from a broken heart. But a viable and valid goal is a moment of partial lucidity where the person at least agrees to start on the pathway you prescribe for making his spiritual life and marriage be what it should be.

SIXTH STEP, BE WILLING TO DO IT AGAIN

What if the addicted sinner doesn't have that moment of lucidity—either partial or complete? Or what if she does have a moment of partial lucidity, agrees to follow the path to healing, but within the next couple of days she changes her mind? If you recall that the person is addicted to sin and that the sin so controls her that she isn't thinking clearly, you won't let yourself become too discouraged by these apparent failures. With those who are chemically dependent, it sometimes takes several interventions to bring them to a point of action. If people in Alcoholics Anonymous care that much and continue to try that hard for an alcoholic they wish to rescue, why can't Christians be just as patient and persistent with people caught up in sin? We can and we should.

If the intervention fails to get the addicted sinner on the path to healing, reconvene the team and do it again. Gather more data—both of actions and consequences—and give it another try. If that doesn't work, try it again.

Is it worth it?

Without a doubt. Keep doing the interventions until the person starts the path of healing. Then, of course, put them on that path and continue to shepherd them as they pursue it. May God bless you as you follow His will and intervene in the destructive behaviors of addicted sinners and as you strengthen and save marriages in your church.



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