

## ***Can Marriage Coaching Help Couples in Crisis?***

*By Jeff and Jill Williams*

The short answer is YES. Marriage Coaching CAN help a couple in crisis IF they are motivated to learn skills to communicate and resolve conflict, and IF they will humble themselves to receive a miracle from God for their marriage. In our experience Marriage Coaching has sometimes been a sufficient process for couples in crisis, while some have required additional approaches.(1)

**Question:** Aren't you talking about counseling?

**Answer:** No. Marriage Coaching isn't another name for counseling, and it is substantially different in philosophy and practice. Marriage Coaches don't diagnose problems and prescribe solutions as in counseling. And, while we don't aim to help people to heal from pain, the testimony of clients is that they are able to use the skills we teach and model to resolve crises and to heal pain.

- In Marriage Coaching we facilitate a process of asking, listening and goal-setting that couples initially learn under our guidance and continue to use outside of our sessions.

**Question:** What is the place of Marriage Coaching amidst the multitude of resources and approaches to marriage? Why do you think it is important for it to emerge as yet another way to strengthen, restore and protect marriages?

**Answer:** We have several responses to this question:

1. Marriage Coaching is a uniquely effective approach that is heavily skills-based.
2. Couples that won't go for counseling will go for coaching.
3. Marriage Coaching offers choice of goals to couples.
4. Marriage Coaching empowers and equips couples to communicate and resolve conflict outside of sessions in their everyday life.
5. Marriage Coaching equips lay people, who lack formal education in advanced people-helping disciplines such as counseling, with powerful skills and concepts to help themselves and other couples.
6. Marriage Coaching can be taught and learned in remote regions of the world in a relatively short period of time and relatively low cost.

### **Help by Any Name is Help**

*"We think you need to refer this couple for counseling,"* we told the Marriage Coaching couple in training during a supervision session. *"It seems that there is a lot of pain that needs to be healed,"* we continued.

*“But you don’t understand our situation here,” the Marriage Coaching couple replied. “We’re all there is. There aren’t counseling centers or agencies to protect women from violence. We are their only hope to get some help. So, please pour into us as much as you can so we can help.”*

This couple lives in a remote area of a closed country where human services are sparse. People there approach them for all sorts of personal help because they are kind, generous, wise and capable, not because they have titles or formal education. The reality is that there are many places in the world where a full continuum of helping professions simply isn’t available.

Skill in Marriage Coaching is the latest training this mission couple has received. And, they say, it is some of the most important with great potential. In fact they are actively translating into the language of their region. *“There is a big, big problem in marriages here, especially after people come to Christ and want to form a more loving and considerate relationship. They don’t know how to do it, but the coaching approach and the emphasis on heart, in addition to skills, helps them to make the changes even when they are having big problems.”*

### **How Marriage Coaching Defuses Crises**

In our experience Marriage Coaching helps couples in crisis best when both partners are motivated to solve their problems and both are willing to take responsibility in the process. This means that both are willing to be facilitated in listening, asking and goal-setting.

In Marriage Coaching *Both partners have to agree to the process for us to agree to serve them.* In fact, in the model Jill and I use, we begin with “The Miracle Question,” *“If God wants to give you a miracle for your marriage, would you be willing to receive it?”* If both say yes, we agree to begin the process. (2)

What then? We actively facilitate the couple to hear each other’s honest thoughts, feelings and desires with *loving listening*; a combination of heart and skill that is hard to beat when it comes to defusing crisis. The capacity of this skill to help couples to hear hard things and to establish common ground for understanding continues to amaze us. In fact, couples that we don’t know to be in pain sometimes take our Level I class and later report that the heart and skill of listening helped them to go places in understanding and healing that they’d not been able to get to before. (Note: the format of the Level I class does not include private instructor facilitation of the couple in listening. Couples teach it to themselves through exercises described in a manual.)

### **Summary**

The Coaching approach can be helpful to couples in crisis and pain. While their issues may be complex, and could include abuse, addictions, adultery and other potential disqualifiers for a non-counseling approach, our testimony is that Marriage Coaching has gone further to help more couples with more problems than we anticipated when we began developing the model.

Whether you school yourselves in our model for Marriage Coaching or another model that is a bona fide coaching model(3) we encourage you to not set any pre-determined limits on how much a couple can be helped by learning to use a simple set of skills to communicate about their honest thoughts, feelings and desires.

# GRACE & TRUTH



1. *We have declined or terminated Marriage Coaching in instances where abuse (mental, emotional, physical), addiction and anger problems preclude effectiveness of a basic relationship skills approach. But these conditions haven't always been known (couple's don't always admit them), and sometimes they have been in remission to an extent that our judgment has been that it is safe and effective to provide Marriage Coaching. Clearly, supervision and consultation, practices in other people-helping professions like counseling and medicine, help to keep Marriage Coaching safe and effective for Coaching couples and couples being coached.*
2. *If either says no, then we refer the willing party for individual coaching with the recommendation to go through a workbook designed for such situations with that coach (same sex) or a capable and marriage-friendly peer. <http://www.reconcilinggodsway.org>*
3. *Not a teaching model that uses coaching in the title but isn't actually coaching as evidenced by asking instead of telling, practicing the discipline of allowing clients to take responsibility for their own lives, and collaboration on goals and action-steps that the client chooses, to name a few distinctions of bona fide coaching.*

*Jeff and Jill Williams are pioneers of a fresh approach to strengthen and protect marriage; Marriage Coaching. They coach couples locally, nationally and in other countries (distance coaching by phone or Skype), and they train couples to coach other couples through three levels of training. They are available for consultation to couples that would like to be coached or trained. Call 301-515-1218 or write to [Jeff.gtre@gmail.com](mailto:Jeff.gtre@gmail.com) or [Jill.gtre@gmail.com](mailto:Jill.gtre@gmail.com).*

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