



## **Four Questions that Help Destructive People to Self-Examine and Self-Reflect**

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When working with men or women who have been abusive, you will find that most all of them have a stubborn blindness to what they are doing that is destructive to others in their life. Their habit patterns are to blame and they accuse rather than take the time to personally reflect upon their own attitudes and behaviors. When they are asked the question, “Why did you behave that way?”, their answer is always externally referenced rather than internally referenced.

For example, he may say, “My wife isn’t supportive, or isn’t affectionate enough”. She may tell you the kids are overwhelming and don’t listen. Others complain, “My job doesn’t pay enough; the traffic moves too slow. That’s why I act the way I do.”

The problem is never with the individual. The person won’t admit that he or she doesn’t know how to handle life’s problems, stressors, or frustrations in a godly way. Therefore, in his or her mind, the only solution is that the other person must stop doing things that make him mad—then everything would be fine and she wouldn’t act that way.

There’s a smidgen of truth in these individuals logic and as ministry leaders we must not get caught in it. Yes it would be easier to be loving, patient, and gracious if our spouse, kids, employers or employees, and everyone else did exactly what we wanted at all times, but that thinking is not living in truth or reality—It’s fantasy thinking.

We all live in a broken down world. We live with sinful people who do not always cooperate with our agendas. We live with people who have their own feelings, dreams, and desires that may be opposite to our own. We don’t always get our way, nor should we.

For example, a husband who believes that he should be catered to, or obeyed

without question because he is the head of his home. Underlying this belief is the thought that he is the king of his castle, and that those around him should always bow to his needs, his feelings, and his agenda. You can see how this belief becomes destructive to those around him.

Sometimes, when seeing a couple together, pastors and ministry leaders see obvious areas where a wife could make some positive changes so that her husband would not get so frustrated. And, sometimes we turn to her and help her figure out ways not to push his buttons.

This is the wrong approach. This strategy only feeds his delusion that his wife is the cause of his problem. It also puts the onus on her to somehow manage his mood and his behaviors. In addition to feeding his delusion, we also give her false hope that, "If only I do it right, try harder, then he will treat me in the right way".

But, it never works. As soon as she fixes one thing, he will find ten other things to complain about. She can never be a perfect wife, so he continues to have excuses to act out destructively towards her.

A destructive person has a prideful heart. He or she is always right. He or she is entitled to perfect treatment at all times. We know a destructive individual isn't open to feedback or correction, because if they were, they wouldn't be in this place to begin with.

Instead, he or she would have learned from the mistakes previously made, and from the negative feedback of his or her spouse—that their behaviors have harmed their personhood and their relationship. There would not be this repetitive pattern of destructive behaviors that has permeated their marriage.

Therefore, the first goal when working with destructive individuals or couples, becomes safety for the victim, and greater self-awareness for the abuser. Before someone can genuinely change or repent, he or she needs to see that they have a need, and that is only possible if he or she begins to humble himself or herself, and realize that perhaps the problem isn't always on the outside, but rather it's on inside.

Instead of trying to fix outside circumstances so he or she won't feel angry, it is crucial that people-helpers focus on helping destructive people, and take responsibility for their own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors—regardless of what's happening in their circumstances.

Journaling is an important tool for a person to become more self-aware and self-reflective, so that in time, he or she becomes capable of being self-corrective, when their behaviors or attitudes are destructive.

Here are some examples of journal questions to assign a destructive individual to answer each night as they learn to reflect upon their day and how they handled themselves:

1. How did my body feel today—Tense? Relaxed? Stressed? Tired? Irritable? Hungry? Anxious? What are my body's signals that I am getting worked up—Headache? Irritable bowel? Pain in my neck? Clenched fists? Am I able to put into words the sensations I am having in my body?

If not, note that you, as his pastor or ministry leader may need to help him learn to understand his or her body's internal warning system, as well as how to express his feelings in a constructive way. Referring this person out for professional help is also an option.

2. How did I treat people—particularly my spouse, children or those closest to me today? Was I respectful? Detached? Engaged? Loving? Deceitful? Abusive? Rude? Manipulative? Sarcastic? Shaming? If I treated someone sinfully, did I take responsibility or blame-shift? Did I apologize? Make amends? If not, why not?

Structuring reflective questions helps ferret out the lies he or she believes and the lies he or she tells themselves, which become grist for personal-growth-work, instead of complaining on how bad he or she has it.

3. Were my actions today in line with the person I say I want to be?

It's crucial that we ask a person what kind of husband/wife and father/mother (person) he/she wants to be? For example, if he says he wants to be a loving husband or a godly man, does he behave that way? If she indicates she wants to be a woman of integrity, was she honest today? If he wants to be a man with a pure heart, was he lustful today? If she wants to learn to be a good listener, did she listen well? If she wants to be a good steward of his body, did she stick to her diet? Drink too much alcohol? Do other things with her body that she doesn't want people to know?

It's important that a destructive individual learn to live from the person he or she wants to be (their virtues and values), rather than reacting from their strong emotions or negative thoughts. This takes time and practice to learn to not allow our strong emotions or negative thoughts have the upper hand. Destructive people need a lot of help in learning how to do that.

Remind the destructive person that it's not a bad thing to ask for help and support. For example, if he wanted to learn how to golf better or wanted to run a marathon, he'd give himself time to learn. He'd practice, and if he got stuck and it

was important to him, he'd seek help from a coach or a person who knows how to help him get where he wants to go. If he wants to change, it's important that he invest in his growth and marriage in the same way.

4. In what non-sexual ways did I show my spouse or children that they are important to me and I care about them today?

Even if the destructive individual is currently separated from a spouse, they can answer this question. Did I help her with the children? Pay the bills on time? Be generous with finances? Communicate kindly?

Asking these four questions and answering them on a daily basis will help the destructive individual (and you) start to notice unhealthy patterns, and ways he/she becomes triggered to react in negative ways. Writing thoughts and feelings down helps a person find words to express what's inside, and it helps him (and you as his pastor or leader) see where his or thinking may be unrealistic, entitled, and self-centered.

Learning to examine one's self and reflect upon one's thoughts, feelings and behaviors keeps a person mindful that he or she is not all better yet; things are not fine just because his spouse is kind. It helps a person see that he or she still has a long way to go if he or she wants their marriage to truly heal.

Remind the destructive person that it's good to see where he or she still falls short so that they don't continue to believe that they have it all together and revert back to old ways. Remind him that the Holy Spirit is here to help him, but he has to slow down, to reflect, and listen to what He is trying to teach him. Help her be compassionate towards herself when she falls short. This is the precursor for him or her to learn to be compassionate towards others when they too fall short.

And, if a destructive person refuses to do this important work, understand that there is no hope he or she will change or stop his destructive behaviors—despite heartfelt words to the contrary.