



***The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*, by Leslie Vernick**

reviewed by Charles Sigler, D.Phil.

One of the most tragic recommendations I make as a Biblical counselor is for someone to read this book. That recommendation means that after discussing their situation, I believe that two Christians aren't living as disciples of Christ; that they have failed to show the world how we are to love another (John 13:34-35). So for this reason, it is one of the most important resources for pastors and counselors to be familiar with and to recommend in their counseling and discipleship of others.

Leslie Vernick has given us an excellent resource to biblically identify and address destructive relationships, which can “profoundly affect our emotional, physical, mental, relational and spiritual health.” (p. 50) She identified five relationship patterns that are always destructive (pp. 27-28)–

1. One or both parties commit physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse upon the other
2. One person is regularly overprotective, overbearing, or both toward the other.
3. One person is overdependent upon the other to affirm his or her personal value and worth, to meet all of his or her needs, and to make most of his or her decisions.
4. One person demonstrates a pattern of deceiving the other through lying, hiding, pretending, misleading, or twisting information to make something appear other than what it is.
5. One person exhibits chronic indifference, neglect, or both toward the thoughts, feelings, or well-being of the other.

–as well discussed the foundational elements for healthy relationships (pp. 36-39): commitment and care; honesty and integrity; and mutual respect. She also provided a

self-assessment questionnaire at the end of chapter one to identify whether a relationship is destructive, and in what way it is destructive.¹

She warns that when you are in a relationship with someone who refuses to see their own brokenness or admit their blindness, you can be in great danger. This inability or refusal to see or take responsibility for habitual, repetitive sin in destructive relationships is the biggest problem in resolving them. Leslie identified seven hardened heart patterns in which this denial is manifested (p. 89f): the proud heart, the angry heart, the envious heart, the selfish heart, the lazy heart, the evil heart and the fearful heart.

She then gave detailed suggestions for stopping and surviving an emotionally destructive relationship. Tellingly, she warned: “If we don’t choose the pain of hard work and discipline required to change, we will later face the pain of regret for not changing.” Her prayer is that you courageously choose the path of change (p. 113).

There is also a section with additional resources for further reading, web sites and crisis/information hotline telephone numbers.

If you read this review because you think you are in an emotionally destructive relationship or because you know someone who is, read this book. If you are a pastor, Christian counselor, small group leader, or active in some other type of disciplinarian-oriented ministry with married couples, you **need to read** this book. Think about it; pray about it; use it. I have steadily recommended this book to women who struggle in destructive relationships since one such woman gave me a copy. Sadly they have usually been in emotionally destructive relationships with their husbands.

¹ You can also find a copy of the the self-assessment questionnaire on her website: LeslieVernick.com.