



The Consequences of a Divided Household

A few days later, Brenda contacted the neighborhood clinic and made an appointment. More concerned with missing a day's pay, Billy reluctantly agreed to take her. The morning of the visit, Brenda awoke, dreading the 20-minute drive to the clinic with him; she feared another bruising argument.

Billy walked into the bathroom. "Your mother is here."

"Where is she?"

"She's in the kitchen fixing the kids something to eat. Do you need her to help you get ready?"

"I can manage. I'll be ready in thirty minutes."

"Just come on outside after you finish getting ready," Billy said, looking around for his wallet. "Where's my wallet? I sure hope your visit isn't gonna be long. We're losing a lot of money with me having to take off, and I'd like to get a few hours in this afternoon, if at all possible."

"Your wallet is on the nightstand," Brenda responded, disturbed by Billy's comments.



Billy grabbed his wallet and walked toward the door. Turning around abruptly, he reminded Brenda that he was going to the casino Friday after work. "I sure hope you're better by the weekend. I'm going up to the casino in Bossier City with Clyde and the boys. If you're not, maybe your mother can come over and take care of you and the kids."

"I thought you were going fishing. The new fishing gear, remember?"

"I do remember! We decided to go to the casino instead," Billy said sarcastically.

"Do you have to go gambling every weekend? We don't have any extra money, and you're wasting what little we do have traveling to Shreveport to go to the casino."

"I'm trying to win money to get us out of debt," Billy replied, slamming the bedroom door closed.

Brenda knew that their marital conflict would not be resolved without devotion to prayer. Kneeling down, she silently began to pray. She asked the Lord to remove the discord from her house and restore her family.



The mood in the car reflected the current state of their unhappiness; for Brenda, the 20-minute drive felt like hours of captivity on a deserted island.

Arriving at the office without incident, Brenda checked in at the front desk and was given a stack of papers to complete. Billy walked away to look for a seat.

The front desk clerk asked Brenda, "Do you have insurance?"

"No," Brenda responded in a whisper.

The nurse guided Brenda on how to complete the paperwork, and informed her that the cost of the visit would be \$175 plus any blood work and related medical care. Brenda turned around to find Billy; he was sitting in a corner scanning the magazine rack.

“The doctor’s visit is \$175,” Brenda said, as she sat next to him. Unresponsive, Billy started flipping through the pages of Time Magazine. “Do you have \$175?”

“No, I don’t! Just use one of the credit cards,” he said with his head bowed.

Brenda completed the paperwork and returned to the front desk with her credit card in hand. Rotating credit cards was the only way they could still purchase anything.

They sat in silence with grim expressions on their faces. Their medical benefits had ended after Billy’s layoff two years ago. Brenda was accustomed to having regular checkups performed for her and the kids, but when the benefits ended so did their ability to get regular physical examinations and dental checkups. The family coverage for medical and dental insurance on her job was extremely costly, and Billy’s contract job at the chemical plant didn’t offer it. Brenda had explored other options for medical coverage, including some of the government and discounted programs, but their household income exceeded the eligibility requirements. Brenda believed her only option was to wait until Billy became a permanent employee at the chemical plant. Until then, all medical expenses were out-of-pocket costs taken from the household budget. Fortunately, none of the kids had been seriously ill — just routine colds and allergies that time and over-the-counter medication helped to alleviate.

While waiting, Brenda thought, *I hope it’s nothing serious. We just can’t afford any major medical problems. We’re barely making it as it is. Even with Billy’s cut in pay, we’d be okay if he didn’t spend all of our money drinking, gambling, and buying his toys. I still can’t believe he spent all that money on those custom wheels — especially knowing we don’t even have medical coverage for our family. How can he be so irresponsible?*

Brenda continued to think about the 8-inch LCD flip-down TV monitor he added to the SUV to impress his friends. The video system with the built-in DVD player, wireless headphones, and remote control had cost them \$650.

I don’t know how long I can continue living like this. Our annual income of \$55,000 is not going to sustain us and Billy’s



thoughtless spending. The kids are growing like weeds, needing clothes and shoes more often. We're drowning, and I can't continue keeping our heads above water if Billy doesn't change his habits.

Interrupting her thoughts, the nurse called her name.

"Billy, it's time to go to the back. Are you going with me?"

"Sure. Anything is better than sitting out here with a bunch of sick people."

They walked toward the nurse.

"Hi, Brenda," the nurse said, extending her hand. "I'm Clara, and I'll be getting some preliminary info for the doctor."

Brenda extended her hand. "Hi, Nurse Clara. This is my husband, Billy."

"Hi, Billy," Nurse Clara said, acknowledging Billy.

Billy nodded his head.

"Let's stop here," Nurse Clara said. There was an open area with a large stainless steel, digital, medical scale.

"I need to get your weight."

The nurse's jovial demeanor helped to ease the tension Brenda was feeling. She explained to Brenda that she would take her weight, blood pressure, pulse, and temperature first.

Sighing at the sight of the scale, Brenda proceeded slowly to step on it. She always hated having her weight taken. The number was an unwelcome account of how much her body had expanded. Deep down, she knew she had gained weight, but the scale was the official scorekeeper. She removed her shoes, socks, and jacket in an effort to reduce the digitized number.

It shouldn't be that bad. I don't feel any heavier, she thought, as she balanced herself on the scale.

Hesitant, she looked down. "This scale is pretty high tech."

In a matter of seconds, the number appeared. Horrified by the truth, she suppressed her emotions and stepped down. Nurse Clara retrieved a printout from the machine. Billy stood off to the side, watching and waiting.

"This is a reading of your body weight, body fat percentage, hydration level, lean body mass, and BMI. The doctor will discuss what the numbers represent during your visit," the nurse said, giving Brenda a copy to review. "I'll need to get a urine sample."

While Brenda was putting on her socks and shoes, Nurse Clara directed her to the restroom so she could get a urine sample. After she finished in the restroom, Clara escorted the couple to an examination room where she collected information related to Brenda's medical history and took her blood pressure, pulse, and temperature. Once she completed her portion of the examination, she informed Brenda that the doctor would be in shortly, and she left the room.

Moments later, the doctor walked in and introduced himself as Dr. Robert. He started by asking Brenda a series of questions. While conducting his examination, he noticed Billy in the corner reading. After he finished prodding and probing, he told Brenda that she had to go down the hall to the lab for some blood work.

"Doctor, is it something serious?" she asked. "I feel like I'm about to collapse. Getting around has become a daily chore."

"I can't really say at this point. We need to do some blood work to help us figure out why you're feeling so poorly. When was the last time you ate something?" Dr. Robert asked.

"Last night around nine o'clock," Brenda responded.

"Good," Dr. Robert said. "Nurse Clara will show you to the lab. We have an onsite lab; so, hopefully, you can wait for the results."

"I can wait," Brenda said, as she and Billy gathered their belongings.

Proceeding down the corridor, Billy asked, "What's the cost of the blood work?"

"I don't know, Billy. I just know I need to have it done," Brenda replied.

"I don't know; most of these doctors are just trying to rack up more money," he said with a skeptical attitude.



“Be quiet, Billy. I’ll manage the cost somehow. I always do.”

“I’ll wait for you in the car. Hopefully, they won’t take all day. You know I’m trying to get some hours in this afternoon,” Billy said, observing the sign-in podium from a distance.

For Brenda, his behavior represented a form of cruel and unusual punishment.



Billy needed an escape. He knew deep down that his uncontrollable spending habits were jeopardizing his family’s future. Walking back to the car, Billy’s mind filled with worry.

How am I going to get us out of this mess? We don’t have medical insurance and I can’t even reach into my pocket and get \$175 to pay for Brenda’s doctor’s visit. She’s right; my spending is out of control. But, I can’t let Clyde and the guys think I can’t hang. We do everything together. There’s no way I couldn’t get those wheels after everyone else was getting them. Even the rod and reel — I had to get them. I can’t have them thinking I’m a henpecked husband. Things were so much easier when I worked at the engineering firm. I was on my way back to school to become a licensed engineer. Now, I’m stuck at the chemical plant in a dead-end job, with no future.

Pressing the remote to enter their SUV, Billy continued to think over his bad choices.

I didn’t even have the sense to invest the money Mom left me. I let Ted talk me into that real estate deal that turned bad. I can’t see clearly. I don’t know what to do. I feel as if I’m backed into a corner with no way out. I just don’t have a clue how to get us out of this mess, and I’m afraid of losing my family. I hate insulting and being mean to Brenda. It’s like I’m using her as my personal punching bag. But, it’s how I deal with the fear and shame of what I’ve created. I can’t even look her straight in the face. I’m ashamed of the predicament I’ve gotten us into. What am I going to do? I need to get out of that casino trip this weekend. The only cash I can get is from the credit card, and

the interest rate for cash on the credit cards is killing us. Clyde expects all of us to have at least a \$1,000 this weekend. I need to save whatever cash is left on the credit card in case Brenda's illness means more trips to see the doctor and more tests.



Ten minutes after the blood work was complete, Brenda waited anxiously in the waiting area for the results. Nurse Clara finally came out to escort her to another exam room. When Dr. Robert entered and noticed Billy was gone, he inquired about his whereabouts.

Embarrassed that her husband was not by her side, Brenda responded by saying, "My husband wasn't feeling well, so he went to the car."

Puzzled by her response, Dr. Robert began to review the blood readings. He explained to Brenda that her blood sugar (glucose) levels were above the normal range. He went on to say she had pre-diabetes that could develop into Type 2 diabetes in the years to come unless she made noticeable lifestyle changes. He stated that he would recommend a course of action to delay or prevent a continuing increase in her blood sugar.

"What kinds of foods do you typically eat?" Dr. Robert asked.

"Because of hectic days, we eat foods that are quick and convenient. One evening, it might be Sunnyland's hot dogs. The kids love their chili-cheese hot dogs or corny dogs with tater tots. Another evening, it might be Pappi's Pizza. They have weekday specials like two large two-topping pizzas with their free cinnamon bread stixs or cheesy bread for \$13.99. Wednesdays are buffet night at Daisy's All-You-Can Buffets. They usually have discount nights for kids, as well as free ice cream cones. On Fridays, I always fry a batch of catfish and fries, served with coleslaw, potato salad, and baked beans from the grocery deli."



“When do you ever get in some wholesome vegetables and fruits?” Dr. Robert asked, looking concerned. “First of all, I need for you to concentrate on modifying the types and quantity of foods you eat.”

“Modify how?”

“You’re taking in too many carbohydrates for starters,” Dr. Robert stressed, taking a seat in his chair. “Let me rephrase that — the wrong types of carbohydrates. A high consumption of carbohydrates, sugar, salt, and fat leads to excess body weight and boosts insulin resistance, a precursor to diabetes. With your steady stream of processed food and fast food, it’s a high probability that you’re going to gain more weight and increase your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes sooner rather than later. Please keep in mind that we’re not just talking about you, but your family as well. You can’t fly solo on changing your habits. You need to take your family along for the ride, also.”

“What is diabetes, Dr. Robert? I know my Aunt Wilma and Grandpa Norman died from something related to it, and my Aunt Sally has it. But, I don’t know what it means for me and my family,” Brenda asked. “My Aunt Wilma was sixty when she died a couple years ago. She lived in Kentucky, so I don’t know how long she had the disease. Seems like I’m a little young at thirty-six to have an old person’s condition?”

“Pre-diabetes and diabetes are not confined to old people. There is a rise among people of all age groups because the diet of the average American has changed so dramatically over the years. Eating habits that consist primarily of high-caloric, high-carbohydrate, fatty foods like what you and your family eat — chili dogs, pizzas, and all-you-can-eat buffets — are causing waistlines, breasts, arms, hips, legs, and thighs to swell, and increase the risk of insulin resistance.”

“Is that what diabetes is? Insulin resistance?” Brenda asked.

“Diabetes in adults develops if the body does not produce enough insulin or does not use insulin properly. To give you an example of why the body might not produce enough insulin — the breakdown can occur from an extended diet

high in carbohydrates, such as breads, pasta, pastries, etc. Whenever we eat, our bodies convert the carbohydrates into sugar (glucose), which is the body's main source of fuel. This causes the glucose level of our blood to become elevated. The more carbohydrates we eat, the higher our blood sugar rises. Consequently, our bodies then need to metabolize this sugar and convert it to energy. Insulin, a hormone produced in the pancreas, allows the glucose enter the body cells, where it's used for energy. It also helps the body to store sugar in muscle, fat, and liver cells for future energy needs. As blood sugar rises, our body produces more insulin to keep our blood sugar at a satisfactory level," Dr. Robert explained.

"So, as long as the body produces more insulin to contain our sugar, it sounds like we're okay?" Brenda interrupted.

"On the outside of every cell, we all have what's known as *insulin receptors*."

"What are insulin receptors," Brenda asked.

"Insulin receptors regulate the amount of sugar that gets into your cells. Over the long run, as you continue eating a diet high in carbohydrates, you create the potential for health concerns. There become too much carbohydrates being converted to sugar. This causes the potential for your body to produce an excess amount of insulin. With all this excess insulin trying to push the sugar into your cells, the insulin receptors get tired. Some of the insulin receptors won't let the sugar into the cells. As a result, our blood sugar rises even more. Because your blood sugar is now elevated, your body thinks it needs to manufacture more insulin to get the excess blood sugar into our cells. This additional excess insulin causes even more insulin receptors to get tired, break down, and close their doors; thus, raising your blood sugar even further. As a result, your body is summoned to produce more insulin, causing more receptors to get tired. Therefore, the cycle goes on and on and on, more insulin causing more insulin receptors to fail and there you go — now the cells are insulin resistant. Ultimately, the body's inability to produce sufficient insulin to push the sugar into the cells leads to Type 2 diabetes," Dr. Robert explained further.