

# CARE RESOURCES

## DIVORCE

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### **MARRIAGE IS GOD'S DESIGN**

*(Urban Life Church)*

We believe that God loves marriage and **God designed marriage to be between a man and a woman**. If you are currently considering divorce, we believe that **God can heal your marriage**. No matter how difficult your marriage may be, we want you to know that there is still hope. [\*\(Also read our article: "Living together before marriage" – to clearly understand God's plan and purpose in regards with marriage\).\*](#)

Our heart for you is to hear what God has to say about your marriage. The clearest statement about divorce can be found in the book of Malachi, " (Mal 2:15-16).

### **FIGHTING FOR YOUR MARRIAGE SHOULD ALWAYS BE THE FIRST STEP**

**Understand that God doesn't hate people who are divorced, but He hates the act of divorce, because ultimately it hurts the people He loves.** Regardless of the circumstances surrounding your marriage, God intends that marriage be permanent. Divorce was not part of His original plan, and He does not desire it to be an option for anyone.

**Fighting for your marriage should always be your first step, and we want to help you.** If your marriage is in trouble, He wants to save yours, too. If abuse is involved (either toward you or your children), separation for protection might be a necessary next step until your spouse becomes repentant and changes. We recommend safety first for you and your children, as well as counselling for the offending spouse. Separation with the intent of reconciliation is okay for a season to maintain safety.

### **RESTORATION IS POSSIBLE**

Restoration is possible. If you will seek God's wisdom to reveal what needs to change in your life, and if you will communicate and pursue the changes you can make, God can bring newness to the marriage that you never before thought of or imagined (James 1:5). He can also do this in your spouse's life when you pray for them. All things are possible through Jesus Christ, including restoration of broken individuals and restoration of broken marriages (Phil 4:13). There is hope for every marriage through the grace, forgiveness, and power that Jesus provides.

### **HELPFUL SCRIPTURES**

- Mark 10:6-9
- 1 Cor 6:12-13
- 1 Cor 7:1-40
- Matt 19:9
- Ezek 18:21

- Ps 38:17-18
- Eph 5:21-33

## **HOW TO AVOID DIVORCE AND SAVE THE MARRIAGE**

*(Mike Tucker)*

Most people begin their married life as a happy couple – avoiding divorce or saving marriage is the furthest thing from their minds because of the blissfulness they enjoy. But as is often the case, **conflicts and bitterness creep in**, and eventually the couple wakes up in the dreary world of “irreconcilable differences” wondering how it ever came to this. Although divorce might seem like a good option (especially since so many couples are doing it), it’s the least effective way to solve marital conflict.

**Taking divorce off the table and doing whatever it takes to save your marriage is the best option. This also avoids the social, psychological, financial and spiritual damage that a divorce will cause. A potential damaging result of divorce is living alone or having a sense of loneliness or isolation. Contrary to what some people might think, it is not easy (or healthy) for a man or woman to be alone.**

Marriage and relationships are vital for creating whole person wellness. (In fact, some societies consider marriage to be prestigious and look down upon single and separated people — this is wrong, of course, but it is interesting.) Besides, marriage provides personal and social stability and helps to satisfy our physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

**Additionally, we all know that divorce and separation can have serious adverse effects on the children.** Their tender minds can be seriously affected by the absence of one parent, giving rise to psychological problems. Prolonged psychological disturbance may affect their ability to lead a normal life later on. Needless to say, your children are one of the main reasons why your marriage is worth saving — they deserve it. You owe it to them to do whatever it takes to repair your relationship.

But trying to save a marriage isn’t easy, that’s for sure. One of the hardest things to do is to acknowledge your role and take responsibility for your share in creating the problems/conflict. The natural inclination is to blame your spouse for causing the marital strife. But that isn’t right.

**Want to avoid divorce and save your marriage? Then follow these steps:**

- 1) To save your marriage, stop casting blame on your spouse. Take responsibility for your mistakes.
- 2) Focus on yourself and do what you can to become a better person — work on your issues.
- 3) Take inventory of any red flags that could be sources of conflict in your relationship such as:
  - boredom
  - broken trust
  - poor communication
  - infidelity
  - emotional abuse
  - addictions
  - lack of sex
  - lack of respect.

Do any of those red flags exist in your relationship? Then roll up your sleeves and get to work finding solutions. Find a therapist, a Christian marriage counselor, a seminar, book, support

group, whatever. Just take action. Doing this early on improves the chances of your marriage being saved.

It seems most of the time divorce occurs due to a lack of understanding and compromise — or because the couple waited too long to work on things.

To avoid divorce and save your marriage, you must be willing to tame your ego and take the initiative to resolve your relationship problems. As it's been said many times before, you can be right or be happy. The choice is yours.

**To avoid divorce and save your marriage you will need some ground rules. Here they are:**

- demonstrate a willingness to listen, really listen, to your partner
- make a genuine effort to not only listen but to understand them
- stay calm and avoid arguing, blaming, rationalizing, or criticising
- be polite and show courtesy and respect (don't roll your eyes)
- ask questions – clarify issues to better understand the source of conflict and to heal it.

If you are having a hard time solving problems on your own, then you owe it to your spouse, yourself, and your children, to enlist the services of a qualified Christian marriage counselor (I recommend Christian counselors because usually divorce is off the table and is only an option in only the most severe situations.) A counselor will help you to become aware of your mistakes and to work through the conflict in finding lasting solutions. Counseling also helps couples to improve their communications skills.

Depending on how bad the situation is, the counselor may recommend a trial separation that is temporary in order to defuse the tension. This gives time for you to think about your relationship problems and to come up with innovative ways to save your marriage.

Although the advice in this article might appear simple at first blush, don't kid yourself (have you actually tried this stuff?). A couple who practices these simple steps to avoid divorce, greatly increase the odds of saving their marriage. So don't put it off any longer. Better days are just around the corner.

## **6 WAYS TO REPAIR AND SAVE A MARRIAGE**

*(Mike Tucker)*

Despite having been married for the last 12 years, Don and Brenda (not their real names) are on the verge of a divorce, despite wanting to save their *marriage*. Although they've tried to save their marriage, their efforts often lead to arguments, which end in what most marriage counselors refer to as emotional disengagement. After the argument they simply ignore one another for days. Though they miss one another emotionally, and dearly want to save their marriage, but they have a hard time reaching out and communicating their feelings; they both wait for the other to take the first step to break the ice.

What Don and Brenda are experiencing is very common in marriages today. They lack the skills required to repair the emotional damage caused by their marriage problems. Additionally, they lack proper anger management skills. All couples fight. But if you want to have a happy marriage, you must be willing to repair the resulting emotional damage. Not only will this save the marriage, but it will enable you to completely recover from the mistakes you have made.

**Marriage problems usually occur when one or both of the spouses is having a bad day, when they are extremely stressed, or have used poor judgment.** The challenge is for you to find a way not to disengage or stay angry at your partner. This applies to both the offender and the offended. If you feel that you are the “offended,” then appreciate your partner’s attempt to resolve your marriage problems.

Here are a few tools to help you solve your problems and save your marriage.

**1. Tool #1 – Apologize**

- A simple heart-felt apology can save marriage especially if you have a hard time admitting that you are wrong.
- Here is an example of an authentic apology: “I’m so sorry. What I did was foolish. And wrong. Please forgive me.” You don’t have to use the above words but make sure it is something along those lines.
- Do it without expecting anything back from your spouse. Keep your heart clean from judgment. Give love and trust God to work in his or her heart.

**2. Tool # 2 – Confide in your partner**

- Unfortunately, many married people today aren’t willing to be vulnerable with their spouses. They mask their feelings with anger.
- If you want to have a better marriage, be honest with your partner; share your fears and insecurities with them. This is a great way to improve understanding, closeness and intimacy in your marriage.
- When you are confiding in your partner, say things like; “I was really worried about our son – that’s why I got so angry. I didn’t mean to hurt you. Please forgive me.”

**3. Tool #3 – Listen to your Partner**

- Listening to your partner is very important when you are trying to save a marriage. Just because you don’t agree with their point of view doesn’t mean that they are wrong.
- Acknowledging their point of view shows them that you consider them an equal in the relationship. It also reveals that you are willing to see things from their point of view (empathy).
- To save marriage, be an active listener and say things like: “I see what you mean, I guess I never looked at it that way”.

**4. Tool #4 – Take Responsibility**

- When marriage problems occur, both spouses are usually to blame. How can you expect to have a better marriage if you can’t even accept responsibility for your role in helping to create the marriage problems?
- Getting defensive won’t help your marriage. Be open and let your spouse know that you take responsibility for your mistakes.
- Ideally you should say things like: “I shouldn’t have done that. I’m sorry. I understand why you reacted the way you did.”

**5. Tool #5 – Find Common Ground**

- Nothing destroys a happy marriage faster than focusing on your differences. To save a marriage, you should choose to focus on what the two of you have in common.
- For instance, if your parenting styles differ, focus on the fact that you both want healthy kids.
- You could say: “I believe we have the same goals even though we don’t agree on the methods.”

**6. Tool #6 – Improve**

- To save a marriage, quit repeating the same mistakes over and over again. If you say you are going to try harder, make an effort. Show your spouse that you are trying to change and he or she will appreciate it.

- If you say: “I’ll make sure I call if I’m going to be late,” make sure you call. Don’t just make promises in order to quiet your spouse.

These six steps are a process for healing the hurts that you and your spouse carry deep within. And, if follow them and don’t give up, your relationship will be restored and you will save your marriage.

## **DOES SPIRITUALITY IMPROVE MARITAL SATISFACTION**

*(Mike Tucker)*

- Studies show that when *spirituality* is valued in a marriage such as when a husband and wife share similar beliefs and religious practices, marital and familial satisfaction rates are significantly higher than in families with few or no spiritual resources or where spirituality isn’t a priority.
- Further, children in spiritual families report higher levels of happiness and familial satisfaction than in families where spirituality is not a key component.
- Studies have also found that if only one person is spiritual, the highest levels of familial satisfaction result when the spiritual person is the husband. Women and children in these families are significantly happier and more satisfied than those in families where only the wife is spiritual or in families where no one is spiritual.

Spirituality is a term that is used to refer to religious belief and practice. More specifically, spiritually is a term that transcends doctrine focusing more on a personal relationship with a higher power.

- For Christian families, a spiritual person is one who seeks to know and relate to God in a positive manner. They hold a positive image of God and carry feelings of warmth about Him. Those positive feelings tend to result in attitudinal and behavioral changes that promote familial satisfaction.
- In short, genuine Christianity results in active spirituality where the believer possesses what the Bible refers to as “the fruit of the Spirit,” specifically identified as: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.
- These positive qualities make people of genuine faith and spirituality more approachable, less self-centered, and more loving – all good traits to have in a family!

So, if you want a more positive relationship and increased marital satisfaction, then it is a good idea to look at your own faith. Do you possess the “fruit of the Spirit?” Has your religion made a difference in how you treat others? When it does, your family will be happier. The research proves it!

## **IF YOU ARE DIVORCED, YOU’RE LIKELY BEARING DEEP EMOTINAL WOUNDS**

Even if you're escaping a terrible situation, the effects of divorce can be devastating. Is there any hope for healing? Psychologist Thomas Whiteman, co-author of *Starting Over* (with Randy Petersen, Piñon Press, 2001) identifies six stages of divorce recovery. We've expanded the stages, adding some suggestions for moving through them. As you complete each stage, you'll be one step closer to recovery:

1. **Denial.** Pretending the divorce never happened or downplaying its importance. While "denial" sounds bad, it's much like physical shock after an accident: The body shuts down

until it can better deal with the pain. At this stage, you may need individual counseling with a minister or a professional counselor. Counseling can help you come to terms with the pain step-by-step as the initial shock of the divorce wears off.

2. **Anger.** Perceived or real injustice about the divorce; it can either be a controlled burn or out-of-control rage. Once you're past the initial pain, being angry about your situation or at others involved is normal. It may even be justified (was the ex-spouse abusive or did he or she cheat?). That doesn't mean, however, that it's any less destructive. You need to control your anger and channel it toward healing. Maybe it's time to train for a marathon or paint the house! If you can't find a healthy outlet for your anger, seek counseling.
3. **Bargaining.** Desperately trying anything to gain back the spouse (jealousy, a makeover, promises to never do something again, a vacation together, etc.). At this stage, you might benefit from a support group. Check out local churches to find one near you. People who have "been there, done that" can remind you in a supportive way that it's probably too late for quick fixes at this point. They'll help you realize that bargaining will likely set you up for a fall when a reconciliation doesn't work out (and the group will be there to catch you if you do fall or to help you put the pieces together after the landing).
4. **Depression.** An empty emotional tank; commonly displays itself in physical ways (sleep disturbances, changed eating patterns, irritability, exhaustion, etc.). Again, it's a normal part of divorce to grieve the loss of your marriage. At this stage, you might want to find an accountability partner — of the same gender — who will listen. You're looking for someone who won't say, "Snap out of it!" but who'll encourage, "Just get through this day or this week, and I'll be here for you." This might be an established friend or it might be someone new you meet through your support group.
5. **Acceptance.** Recognizing the past is past; it's time to live in the present, and perhaps get ready to step forward into the future. This step occurs like a "light bulb" moment. It's an internal realization not easily brought about by outside influences. Yet a support group might help if you feel stuck in a previous stage and can't accept what's happened.
6. **Forgiveness.** Releasing animosity toward the ex-spouse and establishing new relationships with healthy patterns and effective boundaries. For this final stage, a support group can be invaluable. Again, the "been there, done that" characteristic of a group can help you make sure the new relationship with your ex-spouse is a healthy one, grounded in the present (not trying to put the relationship back together) and aiming toward the future. This is the deep-cleaning stage, and a group can lift you up if you have feelings of emptiness (a resignation that the divorce is final) or renewed anger (if your ex-spouse doesn't accept your apologies).

## **WAYS TO FIND HEALING AND HOPE AFTER DIVORCE**

*(Whitney Hopley Live It Editor)*

God grieves alongside you as you mourn the death of your marriage. But the end of that dream, as painful as it is, doesn't have to prevent you from dreaming again. God will help you let go of the life you'd planned so you can live the life that's waiting for you.

Here's how you can find healing and hope after divorce:

1. **Know that you're not alone.** Understand that others have also experienced the tragedy of divorce in their lives. Take heart that God is with you as well, and that He cares about what's happened to you.
2. **Move your focus from the past to the present and future.** Realize that you can't go back in time to save your marriage, but you do have the power to go forward toward a better life. Ask God to take all the pieces of your shattered dreams and arrange them into fresh dreams for your new life.
3. **Face the reality of your emotions and circumstances.** Don't try to avoid the pain of your life's upheaval and all the intense emotions (grief, guilt, anger, humiliation, hopelessness, etc.) that go along with your divorce. Admit the way things really are and the way you really feel about that. Accept your new role as a single woman. Realize that by allowing yourself to honestly face reality, you're starting the healing process. Know that facing your vulnerability makes you more able to grow spiritually.

Remember that pain won't last forever, but it's a valuable tool that can point you in the direction of healing. So embrace your pain. Go ahead and cry as often as you feel like it. Remember that Jesus suffered deeply on Earth, and God's Spirit grieves along with you. Pray about all your concerns, trusting that God cares and will listen to every prayer.

4. **Use "turnabout thinking."** Invite God to turn the disappointments and despair in your life into building blocks for a new you. Ask Him to show you some gifts that may be hidden in your current situation. Ask Him to develop a new sense of poise in you, help you discover a new sense of purpose, and motivate you to pursue a new passion for life itself. Ask yourself, "How might I make the world richer once I've gone through this present distress?," "What am I learning about myself?," and "What three qualities do I most like about myself?".
5. **Be kind to yourself.** Understand that your broken heart is drawing almost all of your energy right now. Cut down on your activities so you have enough time to rest. Eat nutritiously and exercise. Make time for silence and solitude. Be patient, expecting that it will take you longer to get things done that it did in the past. Plan accordingly.
6. **Take some small steps toward positive change.** Do something - no matter how small - to tangibly remind yourself that you're still a creative and resourceful person who can move into a hopeful future with God's help. Make some changes in your life, such as getting a new hairstyle, starting a garden, or painting the walls in your home a new colour.
7. **Choose forgiveness over revenge.** Be aware of how your hurt can turn into hate. Realize that we're all sinners who have the potential to act in evil. Ask God to break the destructive influence of evil in your life and give you the strength to forgive your ex-spouse.

Know that forgiveness doesn't mean you have to forget or condone what happened to you. Instead, forgiveness cleanses your spirit from the poison of bitterness and enables you to celebrate the possibilities of your new life. Realize that forgiveness isn't dependent on whether or not your former spouse deserves it. Forgiveness is something that God gives to everyone, and expects of everyone who wants to have a right relationship with Him. Expect forgiveness to be a process rather than a one-time event, so be patient.

Offer God your heart and ask Him to make it new, empowering you through the Holy Spirit. Pray for your ex-spouse, asking for God's best will to be done in his life.

8. **Ask God to renew your mind.** Pray for the wisdom to discern what's fact and what's fiction when it comes to your broken marriage. Own what's real and let go of what isn't real. Clarify what parts of your circumstances can be changed from what can't. For the things you can't change, change the way you think about them. Make a list contrasting what you want from what you truly need. Open your heart to the journey in front of you, and walk forward, gaining confidence with each step and not looking back.

Don't let your former spouse's rejection define you; embrace God's deep love for you. Ask God what you can do today to grow into the person you want to be in the future.

9. **Broaden your vision.** Ask God to give you a vision for every area of your life - your job, where you'll live, new friends, etc. - in three months, six months, one year, and five years from now. Dare yourself to behave as if you believe that something great is going to happen in your life. Put yourself in a position that makes it possible to happen. Be confident that God will complete the good work He has begun in you.
10. **Let go of whatever holds you back.** Get rid of things and emotions that keep you stuck as you head for greater healing. Physically let go of things like clothes and furniture that remind you of your ex-spouse. Emotionally and mentally disengage from places, people, and possessions that played a part in your former marriage by allowing them to take on a different meaning.
11. **Be persistent in your efforts to heal.** Rely on God's power every day to help you endure and overcome loneliness and fear. Know that you are going to make it.
12. **Decide to thrive.** Reject a poverty mentality and embrace an attitude of generosity toward yourself and others. Decide to be enthusiastic about life and all its possibilities. Say "yes" to opportunities instead of assuming you couldn't do something. Be kind to others as often as you can and watch joy come back to you.
13. **Embrace the new you.** Ask God to help you trust Him, yourself, and other people who are trustworthy - despite whatever betrayals and abuses you may have experienced before. Know that your present and future can be radically different from your past. Seek to grow in God's wisdom. Take risks to grow deeper in your faith. Consider doing such things as writing a book, returning to college, or going on a blind date, as God leads you.
14. **Help your children.** Expect your children to be angry about the divorce, and establish a safe zone for them to vent their anger. Be prepared for tough questions. Answer briefly and age-appropriately. Do as much as you can together: chores, play, naps, and creative projects. Make affection a daily habit, even if your children shrug it off.

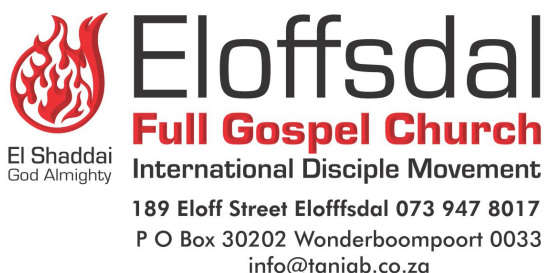
Accept that you can't control what your children do with your former spouse. Minimize changes in your schedule, neighbourhood, and church. Make your dating a low priority at first; allowing your children time to adjust. Affirm and reassure our children that the divorce is not their fault. Try to be the best parent you can be. Make time during the week just for each child. Take good care of yourself, so you can better care for your kids. Allow your children to be children; don't expect them to be your caregivers. Make yourself available to your kids at all times.



Models the values you talk about, such as fairness, honesty, and forgiveness. Don't speak negatively about your children's father in front of them; if you do, apologize. Surround yourself with people who reinforce your values and will support and encourage you in your parenting.

15. **Look for the humour in life.** Enjoy life as much as you can and make time to laugh on a regular basis. Understand that humour has healing power because it decreases stress and releases healthy chemicals in your body.
16. **Know that you are safe, secure, and loved.** Know that you're safe because you have come out of divorce without allowing evil to destroy your soul or take away your desire to live. You're safe because you rely on God's power and on the people who love you. Know that you're secure because your ex-spouse's opinion of you doesn't matter. Your security comes from your unshakeable position as God's child and your trust in His promises to you. Know that you're deeply and unconditionally loved by God Himself. In His eyes, you're not broken; you've been made whole through His love. Celebrate the fact that God is a lover who will never leave.

*Adapted from When He Leaves: Help and Hope for Hurting Wives, copyright 2005 by Kari West and Noelle Quinn. Published by Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Or., [www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com).*



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