



When Your Marriage Becomes Difficult

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Every marriage will go through difficult times. This is because there are two completely different people living within close proximity of each other. Even the best of couples will have rocky times that will test their marriage vows. What happens when the flame of love has gone out in the marriage? What happens when it feels unbearable? What do I do when there is abuse? Walk through the following steps as you prayerfully evaluate your situation.

STEP ONE – Take the Expectations Test

We all carry a box of desires into our marriage. These desires may be to own home, start a family, being loved, career aspirations, etc. The problem comes when we move the objects out of the desire box and into the expectation box. Life is all about what happens to our expectations. What do you expect from your spouse? How selfish are your expectations? How realistic are these expectations? Have you clearly communicated your list to you spouse? Are you demanding in what you want? Now, if your expectations are realistic, normal, and God honoring, move to the next step. If they are not, rearrange your expectations to fit reality.

STEP TWO – Discern between Minor from Major

Always “Major on the Majors” in regards to character issues (trust, honesty, integrity, etc). Likewise, “Minor on the Minors” in regards to preferences and differences of opinions. In most marriages, opposites attract. That can be a good thing but also a source of arguments. Focus on having a mature response when there are honest disagreements. Many times the trouble in marriages comes down to one or both spouses being selfish. This is the fuel that will destroy your marriage! On the other hand, treat character issues seriously and promptly. Anything that erodes the foundation of trust must be dealt with and not ignored.

STEP THREE – Anticipate Hope

Major problems arise in a marriage when someone abuses or abandons their biblical role. This could be the husband not showing love to his wife or the wife not showing respect to her husband. This sometimes accelerates to the point of someone breaking faith with their spouse and violating their wedding vows. (Malachi 2:16). While God hates divorce, He permits it for marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:8-9) or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (I Corinthians 7:15). In God’s grace, he allows men and women whose spouses have been unfaithful the freedom to start over.

Nevertheless, God is in the business of helping couples redeem what many would see as a hopeless situation. “Even marriages that have faced one or more of the big ‘A’s – abuse, affairs, or addictions – can be saved,” says Mitch Temple, a licensed counselor from Focus on the Family ministry. There are numerous examples of couples who have come through the dark valley of these big ‘A’s and are now more in love than ever before! Is it hard work? YES! Is it possible when both spouses allow God to help them? YES!

STEP FOUR – If needed, Protect Yourself and Children

Abuse in the marriage or home should NEVER happen. Sadly, sometimes it does happen. This causes all trust and security to evaporate leaving behind confusion, fear, and instability. If abuse happens, the most important thing you can do is to take steps to protect yourself and your children from harm. You should not risk the safety of your children or yourself in the attempt to save your marriage. A period of separation, along with clear boundaries, is needed for the abuser to obtain much needed counseling and accountability in order for health and trust to return. Even in these dire circumstances God can do His work of reconciliation. When faced with abuse, people often are quick to file for divorce. This may sound like the reasonable thing to do but the Bible is silent regarding abuse being a biblical reason for divorce. We advice those in abuse situations to separate for safety sake and wait for God’s work of reconciliation. This reconciliation may take weeks, months, or even years. We believe that God will bless you for honoring your wedding covenant in the face of very difficult circumstances.

STEP FIVE – Seek Guidance – Don’t Go it Alone

Whatever situation you are in, don’t struggle through a difficult marriage alone. Don’t justify, hide, or enable sinful or abusive behavior. You need the church body like never before – for perspective, advice, counseling and encouragement. Don’t fall into the trap of isolation. It is in isolation that Satan scores his many victories.

Take advantage of the Going Further resources for help from others who have been in your situation.

Going Further - Resources on back

Going Further – Resources

Recommended Books:

- *Breaking the Cycle of Divorce* by Dr. John Trent
- *Boundaries in Marriage* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend
- *Love Must Be Tough* by Dr. James Dobson
- *Lies Women Believe* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss
- *Torn Asunder – Recovering from Extramarital Affairs* by Dave Carder
- *Love and Respect* by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs
- *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman

Recommended Websites:

- www.troubledwith.com contains articles, Q & A, resources, and referrals related to family problems.