

HOPE FOR A DIFFICULT OR ABUSIVE MARRIAGE

Those who marry will have troubles. That's what Paul told the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 7:28). Even the best couples can struggle to protect their marriage vows. But what happens when marriage troubles become unbearable? Is there a point at which couples should end a bad marriage? Or is there hope for something better? Walk through the following steps as you prayerfully evaluate your situation.

STEP ONE

Honestly Discern the Trouble

Unfortunately, many marriages end today over challenges that could have been resolved. University of Texas researcher Norval Glenn has found that divorces today are often blamed on problems such as "too much conflict and arguing," "lack of commitment," "unrealistic expectations" and "lack of preparation." These are problems that both husband and wife can and should work to overcome. Despite what friends, family or popular culture might say, these issues are no reason to end a marriage – especially in light of the serious long-term impact of divorce on your children.

In their book, *The Case for Marriage*, Maggie Gallagher and Linda Waite state that couples who thought their only options was to either divorce or be miserable, often found things got better when they decided to "stick it out." In fact, almost eighty percent of those who were "very unhappy" in their marriage – yet stayed together, described themselves as "very happy" just five years later!

STEP TWO

Anticipate the Hope After the Trouble

When someone abuses or abandons their role in a marriage – violating their vows and breaking faith with their spouse – major problems occur. While God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), He permits it for marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:1-8). In God's grace, He allows men and women whose spouses have been unfaithful to start over.

**God is in the business of healing, redeeming and restoring
what seems like a hopeless situation.**

Mitch Temple, a licensed counselor with Focus on the Family's marriage ministry, says: "Even marriages that have faced one or more of the big 'A's – abuse, affairs or addictions – can be saved." Many couples who have faced these major challenges and even had Biblical grounds for divorce have found a way to save their marriages.

In Dr. Gary Chapman's book, *Loving Your Spouse When You Feel Like Walking Away* he writes, "Hope in a desperate marriage comes from four bedrock truths. When people accept these truths as reality, they become people of hope, and their marriages gain a platform for change, even transformation." Here are the four truths:

- You are not a victim of your circumstances. "Your environment may influence you, but it need not dictate or destroy your marriage and your life."
- "People can and do change."
- Misery or divorce are not the only options in difficult marriages.
- No marriage is completely "beyond hope."

STEP THREE

If Needed, Protect Yourself and Children

If your relationship is marked by physical or severe emotional abuse, the most important thing you can do right now is take steps to protect yourself and your children from harm. Even if you want to save your marriage, you should not risk the safety of your children or yourself. A period of structured and therapeutic separation may be needed to make it possible for you to get the help your marriage needs while making your family less vulnerable.

STEP FOUR

Seek Guidance – Don't Go It Alone

Whatever situation you're in, don't struggle through a difficult marriage alone. You need the Lord like never before. He is eager to hear your prayers and walk this journey with you. Whether you are praying together or praying for your marriage alone, the power of prayer can make all the difference. You also need the church body like never before – for perspective and advice, counseling and encouragement, and hope for God's redemption. Consider the resources on the back page as part of your next step.

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GOING FURTHER

RESOURCES

Love and Respect by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs

Helps couples escape the "crazy cycle" of marital conflict by understanding one another's greatest need.

Breaking the Cycle of Divorce by Dr. John Trent

Helps those raised in a divorced family avoid the same fate in their own marriage.

Boundaries in Marriage

by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

Helps individuals establish healthy boundaries when married to a difficult spouse.

Love Must be Tough by Dr. James Dobson

Helps victims of adultery or abuse confront their spouse's wrong choices and behaviors.

Loving Your Spouse When You Feel Like Walking Away

by Dr. Gary Chapman

Encourages husbands and wives to embrace the positive actions that one individual can take to stimulate constructive change in a relationship.
