DIVORCE & RELATIONSHIP RECOVERY 101

Standing on Romans 8:28

Facilitators
DIVORCE & RELATIONSHIP RECOVERY

Divorce recovery is not something that can be accomplished in a day or even in a week or two. It is a process of healing that takes time. **Divorce healing** begins and ends with God.

Healing is a choice. You have to make the decision that you will take the time you need to heal and do those things that will facilitate healing. There are some practical **steps to healing** that you can begin to implement in your life right now to start your journey of recovery.

Part of making the choice to heal is willingly **taking responsibility** for yourself and even **confessing** any mistakes you have made. If you are waiting around for someone else to come along and solve all your problems, you could be waiting for a very long time. You need to be an active part of the solutions.

As you move through the recovery process, it is important to recognize the **stages of divorce recovery** as well as the emotions that you will experience. Understanding that what you are feeling is normal and recognizing what the stages are as you move through them will bring you **hope after divorce** and comfort as you anticipate the onset of the next stage and see your **divorce healing** progressing. **Surviving divorce** may seem impossible at the beginning, but I can assure it is not. Yes, it is difficult. Yes, it hurts. Yes, it is hard to even begin to imagine what your life will be like in the future. The goal though, is to not only survive by going through the motions of daily life, but to come to a place where you have a renewed sense of **hope after divorce** and begin to look ahead to the future with expectation.

**Let’s look at the Healing Aspect**

Divorce healing takes time. The loss one feels when their **marriage** ends brings grief similar to that experienced with the death of a loved one. However, when a loved one dies, it is a final separation until you are reunited in heaven. With a divorce, especially if children are involved, the person you lost is still around, they just are not with you.

If you have children, you will see your ex-spouse on a regular basis. Their ongoing presence is a constant reminder of a marriage lost. Each time you see them, your emotions will stir, sometimes in unexpected ways, until you have achieved full divorce healing. If you do not have children and you run into your ex-spouse somewhere, you might experience feelings of anger, sadness, loss, grief and even jealousy. These emotions can surface months or even years after the initial **separation** even though you may have thought you were over it.

Divorce healing does not happen overnight. People have often shared with me that one of their biggest frustrations in the recovery process is when well meaning friends and family advise them that “**it is time to get over it and move on**”. Regardless of how much time has passed, everyone mends at their own pace. Denying your feelings does not facilitate recovery. Wallowing in them, however, is not productive either. You must meet your feelings head on and work through them. Understanding the **stages of divorce** can help you be aware of the different emotions you may experience as you heal.

One of the earth shattering realities of divorce is that what you may have thought was stable and reliable and would always be there - **your marriage** - is also subject to the whims of humanity. Like everything else, it can disappear in an instant. This reality can fill you with feelings of fear and uncertainty.

When your marriage breaks down, it can feel like the ground has been pulled out from under you. Nothing in this world is guaranteed. Everything is fragile and perishable. Everything that is, except God, the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). When your life seems to be in a shambles, turn to the one who is always constant, always reliable, always dependable, always loving and always the same. God said He would never leave
If your marriage was the foundation of your life, on which everything depended, you may feel like you have nothing left to live for. If the center of your life is your marriage, your job, your kids, your looks, your status or even your possessions, you are like the foolish builder who built his house on the sand. When the storms came, his house fell with a great crash. If on the other hand, Jesus Christ is the center of your life, you are like the wise man who built his house on a rock. You are able to withstand the storms of life (Matthew 7:24-27) and draw on Him for strength (Psalm 18:2) and divorce healing.

Essentially, your ability to recover from your divorce and experience full divorce healing begins by putting your faith in Jesus Christ. Jeremiah said that if God is the one doing the healing, then he would be cured (Jeremiah 17:14). How then does God heal you? He heals you through Jesus Christ. When you put your faith in Jesus, God can heal you. Isaiah tells us that it is through the suffering Jesus took upon Him on your behalf that you are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

Jesus is no stranger to grief and sorrow. Isaiah referred to Him as the man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3-4). Jesus, before going to the cross, said he was so full of sorrow that he could die (Matthew 26:38). Why would the Son of God allow Himself to experience such rejection and heartache? To offer you hope and renewal.

God heals and blesses the brokenhearted (Psalm 147:3; Matthew 5:4). In fact, God is so concerned about you that He keeps track of all your sorrows (Psalm 56:8). He collects your tears in a bottle and keeps a record of them. God is close to the brokenhearted and rescues them from their troubles (Psalm 24:18-19).

God is the only one who can bring you to a place of complete divorce healing. He is, after all, the one who created you in the first place. God is the great physician. God says if you draw near to him, he will in turn draw near to you (James 4:8). Jesus invites you, who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, to come to Him and He will give you rest (Matthew 11:28-29).

In the same way that you would go to the doctor if you were sick, God invites you to come to him for the remedy. A doctor will give you medicine to treat an illness but it only works if you actually take it. God also gives you some steps to healing you can take that allow you to be an active part of your own recovery but you need to use them in order for them to work.

Discover some proactive steps to healing you can take to help facilitate divorce recovery in your life?

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NOW LET'S LOOK AT THE STEPS TO HEALING

Complete healing can only come from God. However, there are steps to healing that you can implement that will facilitate His healing work in your heart and life.

1) One of the most important steps to healing is **prayer**. God will not force healing on you, you need to ask Him for it. You can choose to wallow in your sorrow and grief and to adopt a lifestyle of bitterness and resentment or you can choose to ask God to comfort, deliver and heal you (Luke 11:9).

God is always listening and He is your constant companion. That will never change. Bring all of your cares to God and receive the peace God promises in His Word (Philippians 4:6-7).

2) One of the steps to healing that works hand in hand with prayer is reading God's Word. The Bible is full of God's expressions of love for you. It is also full of God's promises to you that you can claim in prayer. For example: God promises to meet all your needs (Philippians 4:19) He also promises that His grace is sufficient for you (2 Corinthians 12:9). Soak up the comfort and power of God's promises for your life.

God’s Word is a source of new life (1 Peter 1:23) and is food for your spirit (1 Peter 2:2).

God’s Word is truth. When you are trying to navigate your way through the confusion and emotions of divorce, God’s Word will cut through the clutter and reveal the truth so you can deal with the real issues instead of the symptoms. (Hebrews 4:12)

3) One of the often overlooked steps to healing, is **worship**. Take the focus off of yourself and put your focus on the all-powerful, all knowing God who loves you. While worship can take many forms, nothing lifts my spirits like songs of praise. Even if I am too upset myself to sing (not that I can carry a tune), just being surrounded with voices singing praises to God is uplifting. You know, in the end, every creature in heaven and on earth will be singing praises to God the Father and Jesus the Lamb (Revelation 5:13).

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4) One of the steps to healing that I drew a lot of encouragement from is **reaching out to others**. You can get a great deal of emotional support through confiding in others. Talking to a trusted confident like a counselor, pastor, or friend can help you work through the issues you are wrestling with and put things into perspective. Talking to those who have been divorced or are going through a divorce, such as in a support group, can be especially helpful.

Don’t be afraid to reach out for help if you need it in other areas too. If you need food, clothing, a ride, childcare or whatever else you find you are unable to provide, ask for help. Divorce is a life altering crisis and you will have a much easier time getting through it if you make your needs known and trust God to provide for those needs. Many churches and communities have programs in place to help in a time of crisis and to assist you in getting your life back on track. Ask your pastor, counselor or others who work with families in your community to direct you to the help you need.

5) As you work through the steps to healing and God speaks to your heart, you may find journaling very beneficial.
The Israelites in the desert turned to idol worship because they quickly forgot all God had done for them (Exodus 32:1-8). We too need to be reminded often of what God has done for us. As you continue on your journey of recovery, you can flip back in your journal and see the healing progress you are making as you work through the stages of divorce.

Writing down what you are feeling can be invaluable. When your mind is full of thoughts and confusion, writing out how you are feeling helps take things off your mind and put them on paper to deal with later. I have found that if I write something down, I feel like I no longer have to work at thinking about it or remembering it.

It can be very therapeutic to write things down that no one will ever see. You can be completely honest and open with yourself and talk through your problems on paper. You don’t have to pretend or season your thoughts to avoid offending or hurting anyone. Just write it down and destroy it after, if you must.

Journaling is not just useful for venting your frustrations but can be very helpful in putting into perspective the things you do have and should be thankful for. As you record the things you are grateful for, give praise and honor to God for providing them. Write at least one thing you are thankful for each day. You will always have something to be thankful for. You woke up this morning filled with the breath of life – thank you Lord. You ate something today – thank you Lord. God’s mercy is new everyday – thank you Lord.

6) One of the steps to healing that allows you to say everything you wanted to say to your ex is writing them a letter. There is apt to be many things you wish they knew and that you wish you had said. Some of those things, if you said them, may cause even more hurt and problems.

In stead of engaging in an argument, you can write everything you want to say in a letter to them. Write it as though they are sitting across the table from you and pretend they are hearing you so you can get the closure you need. However, DO NOT MAIL IT to them. Do not post it on Facebook or send it out to your email list. Get what you need to get off your chest, off your chest and destroy it.

Not only does writing a letter to your ex allow you to say everything you have ever wanted to say, it also finishes the battle. Never giving them the letter closes the door on arguments or rebuttals. Having said what you needed to say, you are free to move on.

7) Another helpful step to healing is reading books about divorce. There is an endless supply of books about divorce written from a Christian perspective. Some of them share stories about people who have come through the difficulties of divorce and survived; others may be devotionals that can re-ignite hope after divorce. It can be very encouraging to hear about how others have navigated the storm of divorce and how God has helped them through.

There are many secular books on divorce as well. As you move through the steps to healing, you will discover God is the only source of divorce healing. You will want to focus your energy on reading books that direct you to that source.
NOW LET'S LOOK AT TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Recovering from your divorce will require that take responsibility for your past, your present, yourself, and your future.

Your Past

Surviving divorce begins by dealing with the past. You will need to take responsibility for any of your actions that contributed to the breakdown of your marriage. You must forgive yourself and your spouse in order to be free to move on. Be honest with yourself and with God. You need to pull out the weeds of sin and regret in order to prepare your heart for new growth.

It may not be easy to identify where you need to confess and repent. When you pray and ask God to show you areas requiring repentance, He will faithfully and gently reveal them to you (Psalm 139:23). This process is not meant to make you feel guilty and feel bad about yourself. It is meant to help you identify areas you can grow in that will help you conform to the likeness of Christ, heal hurts from the past and give you hope after divorce.

There are two people in a marriage. While it is possible that your spouse terminated your marriage or their actions were the cause of divorce, there may be ways you contributed to its demise as well.

For example, if your spouse had substance abuse problems or addictions and you enabled them by covering up their behavior or making excuses for them. Enabling and codependency tend to go hand in hand. In order to avoid ending up in a similar dysfunctional relationship, it is important to get the Christian counseling and help you need to identify what is in your heart that draws you to those kinds of relationships.

There are many sources of emotional support available to assist you in dealing with those issues as you work at surviving divorce.

YOUR PRESENT

Surviving divorce compels you to examine your present situation and take responsibility for what you can change and what you can do now. It is important not to get overwhelmed with all that needs to be done. Keep a notebook with you and when things come to mind that need to be taken care of, write it down if you cannot deal with it right now. Take it one day at a time.

What can you do today?

Maybe your spouse just left you and today, all you want to do is stay in bed and cry. Well today, you can cry out to the Lord and trust in Him to help you (Proverbs 3:5, 6)? Maybe a few days or weeks have passed and you are able to begin putting the pieces back together. Maybe today, you can begin to look after some of the financial changes you will need to make like going to the bank and opening your own account or cancelling joint credit cards. Maybe it has been a year or more you are ready to begin the process of filing for divorce. Whatever the case is, you do not have to do it all today. Do what you can do today and write the rest down to do another day.

Often in marriages, there are many things one spouse or the other looks after. When you find yourself alone, there will be many things you now need to be responsible for that you may not have had to look after before. Each time you do something new for yourself, you build up your confidence and self-esteem. The more you learn to do things for yourself, the more you realize you are not only surviving divorce but are beginning to thrive.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. A woman came into my office after her husband left her. She was devastated and lost. After she graduated high school, she married and has been at home with her children ever
since. She has never worked, never handled any finances, and never made any decisions for herself short of what
to cook and what to do with the children that day.

She trusted God and began to deal with each issue as it came up. She made the phone calls and did the leg work
she needed to do to take care of herself and her kids. As she did this, she soon realized she can be the mother her
kids need her to be and look after herself and them with God’s help.

She grew from needing her husband to look after her, to a woman who knows she can manage if she needs to. Now, instead of approaching her husband as a needy and fearful wife, she can work at restoring the relationship
on the basis of love and respect instead of out of desperation. It wasn’t easy. She had to ask a lot of people a lot of
questions to find the resources and information she needed. Now, she is thriving in her new life not just surviving
divorce thanks to God’s help as He carried her through it all.

The same can be true for you. Put your trust in God and take each day one at a time. Ask yourself each day -
“What can I do today and what can go on my list for another day?”

Are there programs offered in your community that are designed to help people surviving divorce? Programs that
provide legal advice, child care, parenting information, education or job placement? Reaching out for help and
finding programs and services that can assist you during this difficult time in your life can be very beneficial.
Knowledge is power. If you are struggling with an issue, keep asking questions until you find the answer or
someone who can direct you to the answer.

Are there people in your church or community that are knowledgeable about areas you don’t feel equipped to
deal with? For example, if your husband always looked after buying cars and you find yourself needing to buy
your first car, is there someone who is a mechanic or a car buff that would be willing help you choose a good car?

Are there financial decisions that need to be made regarding things such as employment and housing? If so, what
is one step you can make today to deal with them? Can you go to a job bank or check want ads? Do you need to
update your resume? Do you need to upgrade your education? If you need to sell your home, have you done
anything to prepare your home to go on the market like minor repairs or deep cleaning?

Do you need to look after legal issues regarding separation or divorce. Do you have a separation agreement in
place? Are you able to do your own divorce? Are there steps to healing you can implement in your life? What can
you do to be an active part of your divorce healing? Top

YOURSELF

Surviving divorce requires you take care of yourself - physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Surviving divorce spiritually means that instead of turning from God in your time of need, you turn to him
through prayer, reading the Bible and praise. It means placing your hope in Him and trusting Him for divorce
healing and comfort. It means trusting God as your source of provision and your source of peace that cannot be
understood by man (Philippians 4:7).

The stress and emotional roller coaster during a separation and divorce may manifest itself physically as fatigue,
nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

Even though you may not feel like it, the first thing you can do for yourself is get dressed and brush your teeth and
hair. Initially, you may not want to get out of bed or get dressed because you may be so distraught that you don't
see the point. For a day or two, hanging out in your pj’s is not really a bad thing but the longer you go without
getting dressed and ready to face your day, the harder it will become to do it. Besides, everyone feels better when
they are clean, dressed and looking good.

Eat healthy and exercise. It can be very easy during high stress times in your life to abandon good habits. You have surely seen the dejected girlfriend in movies who turns to her ice cream when she is dumped. Personally, my comfort food is chocolate. While chocolate in small amounts is not harmful, replacing a spouse with it is.

We all know exercise is good for us but did you know it can also help with depression and anxiety. The Mayo Clinic outlines some of the reasons for that, in their article “Depression and anxiety: Exercise eases symptoms.” Essentially, exercise releases feel good chemicals in your brain such as neurotransmitters and endorphins that actually make you feel better.

Because your immune system can be lowered during periods of grief and high stress, it is more important than ever to look after your health. The last thing you need is to be sick on top of surviving divorce.

Some other things you can do to look after yourself may be to join a small Bible study group (grow spiritually and make some new friends), take a course (build confidence and perhaps new job skills), take up a hobby, join an exercise group or club or even volunteer to help those less fortunate than you (nothing lifts you up like helping others, plus it puts your own difficulties into perspective). There are many things you can do within your budget and the time you have to look after yourself and to begin building your new life.

Since your goal is not merely surviving divorce, but recovery, you will want to learn more about divorce healing and some practical steps to healing you can begin implementing right now.

**YOUR FUTURE**

Beyond surviving divorce, your future awaits you. Your new life, is up to you. As you plan for the future, you will need to take responsibility for things like saving for your retirement, life insurance and even preparing a will.

**What about a new relationship?** The biggest mistake I see people make after a separation or divorce is getting involved in another relationship too quickly. First and foremost, you are still married until you have filed for divorce and have received your certificate of divorce. Beginning a relationship before you are even single does present some issues. Secondly, if you do not take the time you need to heal and to work through whatever issues you had in your last marriage, you are bound to carry them forward to the next one. Trust God to know when you are ready. God knows who, if anyone, is supposed to be with you and He will make sure that you find each other when the time is right.
NOW LET'S LOOK AT CONFESSION/CONFESSING

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

On your road to divorce recovery, one of the things that helps put the past behind you and prepare you for the future is confession. When you hang on to and hide your sin, it not only hinders your relationship with God but it also holds you in bondage to guilt, fear and shame.

Guilt is a heavy load to carry just like unforgiveness is. It says in 1 John that if you confess your sin, God forgives. It requires you acknowledging where and how you were disobedient to God’s will. Even if you were the one who was trying to hold the marriage together, you are still responsible for your actions and any contribution you knowingly or unknowingly made to the relationship breakdown. You may even need to own up to one or more of the causes of divorce.

The problem is, not only did the enemy convince you to sin in the first place, he may now be trying to convince you that it is better to keep it hidden. Maybe you are thinking “If people really knew how selfish, unforgiving, bitter, angry or whatever you were, they would never speak to you again.” Well, maybe that is true in some cases. But, you might be surprised how free you feel when you humble yourself to both God and someone else. The stranglehold of shame and the fear of being exposed disappear.

Trying to hide your guilt and cover up your sin is useless anyway. God already knows everything. Who does it hurt then? Well, it hurts you because you give the enemy the power to hold a sin against you that the blood of Jesus was already shed to forgive. It also hinders your fellowship with God because you refuse to admit where you have intentionally or unintentionally sinned.

To whom do you confess?

Firstly, you need to come clean to God even though he already knows what you have done, said and thought. He wants you to come to him and admit your shortcomings and accept his forgiveness.

James 5:16 says “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. “

Secondly, you need to open your heart to others. Shouting all your sins from a soap box in the street might be extreme. Sharing all the colorful names you called your ex-spouse with your children is totally uncalled for. But, confiding your sins to a trusted confident who will pray for you and still love and accept you after you have done so, will release you from the power of guilt, fear and shame.

Christian Divorce Support Online offers you a safe place to unload to other Christians whatever it is that is weighing on your heart without the fear of condemnation. No one is perfect. We all fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). You can even divulge your sin anonymously if you wish. The power comes not in others knowing who you are and what you have done but in you knowing that others still care and God still loves you regardless of what you have done.

Have Something Weighing on Your Heart You Want to Confess?

James 5:16 says to confess your sins to each other. Free yourself from the shame, guilt and fear of your sin and give others the opportunity to stand in prayer with you.
LET’S EXAMINE THE STEPS TO HEALING AFTER DIVORCE

Complete healing can only come from God. However, there are steps to healing that you can implement that will facilitate His healing work in your heart and life.

1) One of the most important steps to healing is **prayer**. God will not force healing on you, you need to ask Him for it. You can choose to wallow in your sorrow and grief and to adopt a lifestyle of bitterness and resentment or you can choose to ask God to comfort, deliver and heal you (**Luke 11:9**).

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What Steps to Healing Have Helped You?

Tell what steps to healing have helped you heal from your divorce? Has something else helped with your healing process? Help others by sharing what has worked for you!

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STAGES OF DIVORCE

There several stages of divorce recovery that you are likely to experience. You may not experience all of these or even experience them in the order given. Understanding the possible stages of divorce and recognizing that what you are experiencing is okay and is normal, given the circumstances you are dealing with, can be comforting. There is no set time frame for each stage. Some people may move through the grieving process faster and recover faster than others. That is okay. The stages of divorce are: shock, denial, bargaining, anger, sorrow, acceptance, and moving on.

SHOCK

If you are not the one initiating the separation or divorce, you may begin the stages of divorce in a state of shock. Oh sure, things weren’t perfect. Maybe you have had some disagreements now and then but over? How can it be over?

You may begin in a state of shock even if you initiated the separation or divorce. Perhaps you just found out your spouse has been having an affair. Maybe you just found out your spouse has a gambling problem and has lost everything you have ever owned and refuses to get help.

Shock is that feeling that this kind of thing only happens to other people. How could it be happening to you? But you are a Christian, how could divorce happen to you? You never planned on getting divorced. You certainly were not hoping your marriage would fail.

DENIAL

Disbelief can easily turn into the denial. Not only can this not be happening to you, you refuse to accept that it is. You may catch yourself saying or thinking things like – “Oh it is just a passing phase, she will come around.” “Once he realizes how much he really loves me, he will be back.”

Denial is one of the stages of divorce that postpones the divorce healing process. As long as you remain in denial, you never confront the reality of the situation. In order for your divorce recovery to begin, you must accept the things you cannot change and work on the things you can.

BARGAINING

The self-talk of denial may bring you to one of the stages of divorce that may not be experienced by everyone, bargaining. With bargaining, you may try convincing yourself and your estranged spouse that you are willing to do absolutely anything to get them back. You might hear yourself saying things like: “If I show her I can give her the kind of fun she is looking for, she will come back.” “If I just work really hard at pleasing him and do everything he asks, he will then realize he loves me and he will come back.”

Let me be clear about the difference between making compromises so a relationship works and bargaining to win someone back. Compromising in a relationship is healthy as long as it is give and take. Each partner makes compromises for the betterment of the whole. However, trying to manipulate your spouse and win them back with your new found desire to satisfy their every whim is not healthy and is not apt to produce lasting results.

The bargaining stage of divorce also includes begging and pleading. Approaching the relationship from a position of desperation is not going to bring you the desired results. What it does do, is impress upon your spouse that instead of being a partner in the marriage, you are completely dependent on them for your happiness. That is a heavy burden for anyone to carry. There are things you can do to save your marriage that do not involve becoming someone you are not or begging your spouse to love you.
ANGER

One of the stages of divorce that has the potential to bring harm to others is anger. Anger often results when bargaining is unsuccessful or when you move past denial and begin to see what is really happening. You will be angry at your spouse, at yourself and maybe even at God. I am not talking about a momentary fit of rage here. I am talking about a sense of anger that overcomes you and you may find yourself lashing out at every little thing and at anyone who crosses your path. Things that normally would not bother you may set you off during this stage of divorce recovery. I remember having no patience at all with my children during this time and found myself yelling at them about even the smallest of things. It was not pretty, but thank God, it did pass.

Anger is a normal reaction when you feel rejected. Anger surfaces in divorce because your self-worth, needs and/or convictions are being threatened. You may be angry because you depended too much on your spouse who has now abandoned you, you feel like someone is trying to control you or make decisions for you, you are holding on to unrealistic expectations, you are afraid or you are holding on to pride.

The Bible says not to sin in your anger (Ephesians 4:26). What that means is, don’t exact revenge or plot malicious retribution. While you might feel like throwing all your spouses belongings out in the street or hitting them with a frying pan, you really shouldn’t do that.

The Bible also says in that same verse (Ephesians 4:26) not to let the sun go down when you are angry. Does that mean you cannot sleep until you are no longer angry? I am sure you would agree that it is difficult to get a restful sleep when you are in an angry state. Anyone who has ever lost a loved one or been rejected knows a good night’s sleep, for a time, may seem like a distant memory. If you find your mind churning with angry thoughts, pray, draw your attention back to God who loves you and to whom vengeance belongs (Romans 12:19-21).

God knows you are hurting. He loves you and has a plan for your life (Jeremiah 29:11). It is in Him that your worth is defined. Even though the pain of rejection may make you feel worthless, no child of God is a loser. As a child of God, you are a joint heir with Christ to the Kingdom of Heaven (Romans 8:17).

SORROW

One of the stages of divorce that, if not faced head on, can open the door to depression is sorrow. It is important to cry if you feel like it and let your emotions out. Bottling up your feelings when you are grieving is not good for you. Shakespeare wrote: "To weep is to make less the depth of grief." Crying releases emotional tension and refreshes your spirit.

If you find your are experiencing a deep sorrow or depression that will not go away, you are entertaining thoughts of suicide, you are repeatedly engaging in self-destructive behavior or you no longer care about yourself or your future, seek professional Christian Counseling right away.

Sorrow can have the opposite effect on your sleeping patterns that anger does, at least it did for me. I had a hard time getting out of bed during my time of sorrow. Others, however, may have difficulty sleeping. Either way, sorrow is real and to be expected. It is that expression of sadness, grief and loss as you mourn what you have lost.

Sorrow, like anger, affects you physically as well as mentally. Mentally, you may feel hopeless, pessimistic and helpless. You may have difficulty concentrating. Physically, it can affect your sleeping patterns, eating habits and your overall energy level leaving you feeling drained and tired.

While it is normal and appropriate to feel sorrow at the loss of your marriage, to move past it, you must move to the stages of divorce that begin to look ahead - acceptance and moving on.
ACCEPtANCE

Of all the stages of divorce, **acceptance** is the one where the tide begins to turn. To accept your loss, you must identify what you have lost and put it into perspective. You have lost your spouse, your companion. You also may have lost dreams and hopes for the future, face to face time with your children, financial support, friends and possibly some extended family relationships. Your spouse is no longer your spouse and you will need to begin thinking of yourself as a single person. By single, I don’t mean you should get out there and start dating. You will need to consider yourself single as it pertains to things like shopping, cooking and scheduling your activities.

You will need to let go of the dreams and plans you had for your marriage and the life you expected. You need to let go of the idea that you can change your spouse or how they react to you. You cannot control how they act or feel.

As you work through the last two stages of divorce, you may find it helpful to pray the Serenity Prayer written by Reinhold Niebuhr. Portions of this prayer have been used for many years in addiction recovery groups.

**THE SERENITY PRAYER**

by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

*God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardship as a pathway to peace, taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it, trusting that You will make all things right, if I surrender to Your will, so that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.*

Once you have given to the Lord those things you have no control over and He grants you the wisdom and courage to change the things you can, you will begin look forward to life again. You will be ready to **move on.**

**MOVING ON**

The final stage, no matter how many of the stages of divorce you experienced and what order you experienced them, is **moving on.** It is here that you begin looking ahead more to what is to come and less to what could have been. **Hope** springs anew in your heart and mind. You have **survived divorce** and you can see how the hand of God has been protecting, comforting and assisting you along the way. You are filled with a new sense of excited expectation about what God will do in your life now. All things are possible with God (Matthew 19:26).

Remember, you will not move through these stages of divorce recovery in a day or even a week. **Divorce healing** takes time. Resolve to take the time you need to work through the healing process. There are some **Steps to Healing** you can begin implementing right now to help you rebuild your life.

**What Stage of Divorce Are You In?**

What feelings are you wrestling with right now? Tell us your story so you can connect with others who are feeling the same way.

**NOW, AFTER DIVORCE, WHAT HOPE IS THERE FOR YOU?**

**Is There Hope After Divorce?** Going through a divorce can leave you shattered, distraught and slumped in a puddle on the floor in despair. All your plans, dreams, desires and expectations of what your life, family and
marriage were to look like have disappeared in one fell swoop. But, there is hope after divorce. **Is this really all there is?**

**No,** this is not the end of your story. This is a mere blink of eye when you look at the span of eternity. In Ephesians 2:12, Paul says when you were separated from Christ and from God you had no hope. The things in this world that you hang your future on will be swallowed up in death (Proverbs 10:28).

As a Christian and a child of God, even though things might seem desperate, they are not. Your future is in Christ. In Him you find life everlasting (1 Peter 1:3). Through Him you will one day be able to live in heaven where pain, sorrow and disease no longer exist.

Instead of focusing on the pile of ashes of the life you once had, turn your focus to eternity. Yes, today is difficult. Yes, today holds pain. Yes, right now tomorrow seems elusive. But, today, Jesus could come back to rapture his church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). If He doesn’t come today, **He still promises to comfort the broken hearted and to never leave your side** (Psalm 34:18, Matthew 28:20). Hope after divorce also comes with the confidence that God works all things for good for those who love him (Romans 8:28).

Jeremiah reminds us in Lamentations 3:21-26 that God is good to those who hope in Him. He also tells us **God’s mercy and compassion are new each day.** He knows what you need for today and He provides it. He will do the same thing again tomorrow, and the next, and the next day and everyday thereafter.

God will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5). He is always right by your side, not matter what you are going through. God extends to you hope after divorce and strength for today (Isaiah 40:31). “**Time heals all wounds...**” or does it for you?

It sounds useless and trite when you are in the middle of a life crisis. But, you can be open to **divorce healing** now so you don’t spend the rest of your life stuck in sadness and despair or you can wallow in your misery and wait until your time here on earth is up. Either way, time will ultimately heal your wounds; the only question is how soon do you want that to happen?

Because God speaks to your heart through His Word, a daily devotional designed for those dealing with divorce can offer comfort and **divorce healing.**

**What Gives You Hope?**

Help ignite the fire of hope in someone else. Share what keeps you going in times of distress and sorrow.

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SOME SIGNIFICANT QUESTIONS REGARDING DIVORCE


What is the status of a Christian who divorces without biblical grounds and remarries? Is he living in perpetual adultery? What about the concept of forgiveness? If someone has remarried un-biblically and seek forgiveness, is he forgiven?

In Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus says, “It has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”

Jesus is saying that the act of remarriage is an act of adultery. He is not teaching that the ongoing conjugal relationship with the new spouse is a state of “perpetual adultery”—as if God refused to recognize the remarriage as legitimate in any sense.

If that were the case—if the ongoing physical relationship between the remarried couple constituted one long, continuous, adulterous affair—the proper remedy, and the only way to end the chain of adultery, would be to dissolve the second marriage and insist that everyone return to his or her original spouse. On the contrary, Scripture teaches that the new marriage is now binding. In order to avoid further acts of adultery, the remarried person needs to remain faithful to the new spouse.

As a matter of fact, in the same passage where Moses permitted husbands to issue a certificate of divorce, the law added this restriction: “When she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man’s wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD” (Deuteronomy 24:2-4, emphasis added).

Clearly, the second marriage—whether biblically justified or not—becomes as binding as the original marriage was supposed to be. A return to the original spouse is strictly forbidden.

So Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:32 (and Mark 10:11-12) mean simply that entering into an illegitimate remarriage is an adulterous act. Nevertheless, once that new marriage covenant is sealed, the remarried couple needs to remain married and be faithful to one another. Their ongoing physical relationship is not to be thought of as “perpetual adultery.”

On the other hand, as long as they remain unrepentant about the illegitimate remarriage, they cannot expect God’s blessing on their marriage. Like all sins, that unauthorized remarriage must be confessed and repented of.

Because marriage entails a covenant that God deems holy, any remarriage (even remarriage after an unbiblical divorce) cannot be—and should not be—forsaken as we would forsake virtually any other sin. But people who have entered into such a relationship do need to seek God’s forgiveness with sincere repentance. And yes, God does grant forgiveness for such sins to those who seek His pardon in Christ.
ADDITIONAL NUANCES AND STAGES OF GRIEF DUE TO A DIVORCE

THE DENIAL STAGE

When you first make the decision to divorce, or have that decision thrust upon you, you may react by acting as though nothing has happened (denial). You may carry on your normal life, going about your normal routines and refuse to believe the reality of what is happening in your life. This stage may also be characterized by a sense of shock or numbness at what has happened, and although you give the appearance of normality, you may, in fact, only be going through the motions.

PAIN AND FEAR

You are going through an enormous change in your life. You may have been hurt badly by the person you trusted most in the world, or may have had to accept that a marriage you have worked hard at is just not going to work. As the denial wears off, the reality of your situation begins to sink in. You will feel pain at the loss of your marriage and fear for what the future holds.

THE ANGER STAGE

You’re looking for someone to blame for this terrible thing that is happening in your life. You could have justifiable anger towards your ex-spouse. Or you may feel anger towards in-laws, parents, friends and even children. While it is normal to feel some degree of anger, if your feelings seem out of control or directed against the wrong people, your children in particular, if applicable, then you should seek professional help. You may also have to deal with the anger of others - your children will be having these feelings, and may blame you for the family break-up, or your ex may feel angry at you if you have instigated the divorce.

THE BARGAINING STAGE

It is normal to try to avoid the inevitability of the end of a marriage by bargaining, either with your ex-spouse or with yourself. You may promise to change certain behaviors if only you can have another chance. This is because you want to try and stop the pain you are feeling and can also be an attempt to take back some control over the situation.

THE GUILT STAGE

Your divorce might not be your fault. Equally, you may not be able to lay the blame squarely at your ex’s door. However, at this stage it is normal to think about how you could have done things differently, how you could have prevented situations and made your marriage work. At this stage, we question the effort we made at marriage and our behavior. This can result in an overwhelming need to turn back the clock, to make things better.

THE DEPRESSION STAGE

It is entirely normal to feel some degree of depression (unhappiness, despair, sadness, downheartedness, misery, hopelessness, dejection, gloominess) when going through a divorce. You may find it hard to sleep even though you feel physically and mentally exhausted. You could lose your appetite or overeat. Being short-tempered and snappy with those close to you is also normal. Remember that others involved could also be feeling like this, particularly any children involved. If these symptoms seem very severe or go on for a long time, in either you or your children, go to God. Biblical Remedy: “God will keep you in perfect peace when Your mind is fixed on Him,” Isa.46:8?
THE ACCEPTANCE STAGE

At some point you will begin to accept the situation. You will realize that life has changed and that it will not return to how it was. Despite this, you feel okay and know that you can move on. Embrace this strength and allow yourself to believe in your ability to be resilient, to cope, and to survive. You will know that you can start a new life, and although that might seem scary, the experiences you have been through will help you to carry on. **Biblical Remedy: Eph. 3:20-21** “God is able to do all . . . .

Healing after a divorce or breakup

Why do breakups hurt so much, even when the relationship is no longer good? A divorce or breakup is painful because it represents the loss, not just of the relationship, but also of shared dreams and commitments. Romantic relationships begin on a high note of excitement and hope for the future. When these relationships fail, we experience profound disappointment, stress, and grief.

A breakup or divorce launches us into uncharted territory. Everything is disrupted: your routine and responsibilities, your home, your relationships with extended family and friends, and even your identity. A breakup brings uncertainty about the future. What will life be like without your partner? Will you find someone else? Will you end up alone? These unknowns often seem worse than an unhappy relationship.

Recovering from a breakup or divorce is difficult. However, it’s important to know (and to keep reminding yourself) that you *can* and *will* move on. But healing takes time, so be patient with yourself.

COPING WITH SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

1. **Recognize that it’s OK to have different feelings.** It’s normal to feel sad, angry, exhausted, frustrated, and confused—and these feelings can be intense. You also may feel anxious about the future. Accept that reactions like these will lessen over time. Even if the marriage was unhealthy, venturing into the unknown is frightening.

2. **Give yourself a break.** Give yourself permission to feel and to function at a less than optimal level for a period of time. You may not be able to be quite as productive on the job or care for others in exactly the way you’re accustomed to for a little while. No one is superman or superwoman; take time to heal, regroup, and re-energize.

3. **Don’t go through this alone.** Sharing your feelings with friends and family can help you get through this period. Consider joining a support group where you can talk to others in similar situations. Isolating yourself can raise your stress levels, reduce your concentration, and get in the way of your work, relationships, and overall health. Don’t be afraid to get outside help if you need it.

Source: Mental Health America

ALLOW YOURSELF TIME TO GRIEVE THE LOSS OF A RELATIONSHIP

Grief is a natural reaction to loss, and the breakup or divorce of a love relationship involves multiple losses:

- Loss of companionship and shared experiences (which may or may not have been consistently pleasurable)
- Loss of support, be it financial, intellectual, social, or emotional
- Loss of hopes, plans, and dreams (can be even more painful than practical losses)

Allowing yourself to feel the pain of these losses may be scary. You may fear that your emotions will be too intense to bear, or that you’ll be stuck in a dark place forever. Just remember that grieving is essential to the healing process. The pain of grief is precisely what helps you let go of the old relationship and move on. And no matter how strong your grief, it won’t last forever.
TIPS FOR GRIEVING AFTER A BREAKUP OR DIVORCE:

▪ **Don’t fight your feelings** - It’s normal to have lots of ups and downs, and feel many conflicting emotions, including anger, resentment, sadness, relief, fear, and confusion. It’s important to identify and acknowledge these feelings. While these emotions will often be painful, trying to suppress or ignore them will only prolong the grieving process.

▪ **Talk about how you’re feeling** - Even if it is difficult for you to talk about your feelings with other people, it is very important to find a way to do so when you are grieving. Knowing that others are aware of your feelings will make you feel less alone with your pain and will help you heal. Journaling can also be a helpful outlet for your feelings.

▪ **Remember that moving on is the end goal** - Expressing your feelings will liberate you in a way, but it is important not to dwell on the negative feelings or to over-analyze the situation. Getting stuck in hurtful feelings like blame, anger, and resentment will rob you of valuable energy and prevent you from healing and moving forward.

▪ **Remind yourself that you still have a future** - When you commit to another person, you create many hopes and dreams. It’s hard to let these dreams go. As you grieve the loss of the future you once envisioned, be encouraged by the fact that new hopes and dreams will eventually replace your old ones.

▪ **Know the difference between a normal reaction to a breakup and depression** - Grief can be paralyzing after a breakup, but after a while, the sadness begins to lift. Day by day, and little by little, you start moving on. However, if you don’t feel any forward momentum, you may be suffering from depression.

▪ **REACH OUT TO OTHERS FOR SUPPORT THROUGH THE GRIEVING PROCESS**

Support from others is critical to healing after a breakup or divorce. You might feel like being alone, but isolating yourself will only make this time more difficult. Don’t try to get through this on your own.

Reach out to trusted friends and family members. People who have been through painful breakups or divorces can be especially helpful. They know what it is like and they can assure you that there is hope for healing and new relationships.

▪ **Spend time with people who support, value, and energize you.** As you consider who to reach out to, choose wisely. Surround yourself with people who are positive and who truly listen to you. It’s important that you feel free to be honest about what you’re going through, without worrying about being judged, criticized, or told what to do.

▪ **Get outside help if you need it.** If reaching out to others doesn’t come naturally, consider seeing a counselor or joining a support group. The most important thing is that you have at least one place where you feel comfortable opening up.

▪ **Cultivate new friendships.** If you feel like you have lost your social network along with the divorce or breakup, make an effort to meet new people. Join a networking group or special interest club, take a class, get involved in community activities, or volunteer at a school, place of worship, or other community organization.

**TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AFTER A DIVORCE OR RELATIONSHIP BREAKUP**
A divorce is a highly stressful, life-changing event. When you’re going through the emotional wringer and dealing with major life changes, it’s more important than ever to take care of yourself. The strain and upset of a major breakup can leave you psychologically and physically vulnerable.

Treat yourself like you’re getting over the flu. Get plenty of rest, minimize other sources of stress in your life, and reduce your workload if possible.

Learning to take care of yourself can be one of the most valuable lessons you learn following a divorce or breakup. As you feel the emotions of your loss and begin learning from your experience, you can resolve to take better care of yourself and make positive choices going forward.

**SELF-CARE TIPS:**

▪ **Make time each day to nurture yourself.** Help yourself heal by scheduling daily time for activities you find calming and soothing. Go for a walk in nature, listen to music, enjoy a hot bath, get a massage, read a favorite book, take a yoga class, or savor a warm cup of tea.

▪ **Pay attention to what you need** in any given moment and speak up to express your needs. Honor what you believe to be right and best for you even though it may be different from what your ex or others want. Say "no" without guilt or angst as a way of honoring what is right for you.

▪ **Stick to a routine.** A divorce or relationship breakup can disrupt almost every area of your life, amplifying feelings of stress, uncertainty, and chaos. Getting back to a regular routine can provide a comforting sense of structure and normalcy.

▪ **Take a time out.** Try not to make any major decisions in the first few months after a separation or divorce, like starting a new job or moving to a new city. If you can, wait until you’re feeling less emotional so that you can make better decisions.

▪ **Avoid using alcohol, drugs, or food to cope.** When you’re in the middle of a breakup, you may be tempted to do anything to relieve your feelings of pain and loneliness. But using alcohol, drugs, or food as an escape is unhealthy and destructive in the long run. It’s essential to find healthier ways of coping with painful feelings.

▪ **Explore new interests.** A divorce or breakup is a beginning as well as an end. Take the opportunity to explore new interests and activities. Pursuing fun, new activities gives you a chance to enjoy life in the here-and-now, rather than dwelling on the past.

**MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES: EAT WELL, SLEEP WELL, AND EXERCISE**

When you’re going through the stress of a divorce or breakup, healthy habits easily fall by the wayside. You might find yourself not eating at all or over-eating your favorite junk foods. Exercise might be harder to fit in because of the added pressures at home and sleep might be elusive. But all of the work you are doing to move forward in a positive way will be pointless if you don’t make long-term healthy lifestyle choices.

**LEARNING IMPORTANT LESSONS FROM DIVORCE OR BREAKUP**

In times of emotional crisis, there is an opportunity to grow and learn. Just because you are feeling emptiness in your life right now, doesn’t mean that nothing is happening or that things will never change. Consider this period a time-out, a time for sowing the seeds for new growth. You can emerge from this experience knowing yourself better and feeling stronger.
In order to fully accept a breakup and move on, you need to understand what happened and acknowledging the part you played. It’s important to understand how the choices you made affected the relationship. Learning from your mistakes is the key to not repeating them.

**SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:**

- Step back and look at the big picture. How did you contribute to the problems of the relationship?
- Do you tend to repeat the same mistakes or choose the wrong person in relationship after relationship?
- Think about how you react stress and deal with conflict and insecurities. Could you act in a more constructive way?
- Consider whether or not you accept other people the way they are, not the way they could or “should” be.
- Examine your negative feelings as a starting point for change. Are you in control of your feelings, or are they in control of you?

You’ll need to be honest with yourself during this part of the healing process. Try not to dwell on who is to blame or beat yourself up over your mistakes. As you look back on the relationship, you have an opportunity to learn more about yourself, how you relate to others, and the problems you need to work on. If you are able to objectively examine your own choices and behavior, including the reasons why you chose your former partner, you’ll be able to see where you went wrong and make better choices next time.

**AFTER OVERCOMING THE SHOCK OF DIVORCE, TRY THESE STEPS:**

1. Turn toward a renewed relationship with God.
2. Find a few friends and family members to form an emotional support system.
3. Make a list of your challenges and resources.
4. Contact an attorney to assist you through the legal process.
5. Find a Divorce Recovery Support Group or individual therapist to help you process your feelings.
6. Be kind to yourself and set aside time for journaling, deep-breathing exercises, or any practice that allows you to relax and collect our thoughts.
7. Remember that there is no right way to grief the loss of a marriage.

**FINDING A NEW IDENTITY IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE HEALING PROCESS**

Learning to be alone, forming new friendships, and finding a new home can be both frightening and exciting. Some people go through this process quickly and others never make it. If the depression is not lifting and the grief is long lasting, you might be experiencing complicated grief. It is important to listen to your “self-talk” and question if your depression prevents you from moving into the stage of acceptance. You might want to seek counseling to help you determine if the sadness you are experiencing is more serious and needs professional treatment.
COPING WITH DIVORCE: The First Year - Q & A

**Question:** What were your initial thoughts/emotions when you realized you were getting a divorce?

**Answer:** At first a sense of shame and failure. I hated that this is supposed to be the most important relationship in my life and it didn't succeed. After working through disbelief, sadness, etc., there was eventually some sense of relief, like a lot of weight was off my shoulders. You can't help but replay the tape wondering what you could and should have done differently.

**Question:** What is the most challenging part of enduring the first year after divorce?

**Answer:** I think the "alone" times were the hardest. I purposefully didn't immerse myself in so much busyness that I couldn't reflect on what I needed to "own" and/or learn. I didn't want to just jump into repeating patterns that might have contributed to the divorce.

**Question:** What other life factors complicate your healing process and how do you cope with those?

**Answer:** I think being in such a public arena hurt at first. Not only socially, but as a (then) college communications professor. A sense of "shame" that an "expert" in communication couldn't hold together the most important human relationship he was entrusted with. And then as a Christian, that I couldn't finish the race marked out for me.

**Question:** Who or what do you turn to heal?

**Answer:** First and foremost to God. I drew upon the true power of Christ to give me a strength I could not get from any other source. Secondarily, surrounding myself with good Christian counsel and encouragement. People who could speak grace and truth. People who wouldn't tell me what I wanted to hear but what I needed to hear. I am blessed to have a healthy church and great friends. Another healing influence is to spend my efforts more in serving others than asking to be served. Finally, as a fledgling distance runner, there is a great deal of cathartic therapy in going out for a nice long run in God's creation, keeping everything in perspective.

**Question:** What hurt the most during the first year after your divorce?

**Answer:** Probably the bouts with loneliness. It was surprising what might set me off. Probably like a human death loss, it could be a date, a situation, a place, a memory, seeing a picture or finding an old knick knack in a drawer.

**Question:** What are some of the biggest hurts you're experiencing?

**Answer:** God has been kind to extend a great deal of inner and relational healing. I also have been blessed with a godly wife and now four children. I still, however, have those occasional self-deprecating thoughts and can be more susceptible to being "wounded" by a comparatively harmless comment by my wife.

**Question:** What is the most difficult part of your experience?

**Answer:** Probably the inner turmoil of trying to discern what was my "fault" and what wasn't. I wanted to "own" and not repeat mistakes. Then there's always the wrestling with God part, trying to discern in His sovereignty why this happened. As a Christian and a pastor, I don't believe there are many "biblically releasing allowances" for divorce beyond unfaithfulness or abandonment.

**Question:** What surprises you about your inner resolve in the face of this crisis?
Answer: I heard once that people are like tea bags and when the heat gets turned up, you find out what is really inside. What I hope is "in there" is Jesus living in me more and more each day. Although I certainly wouldn't want to go through this again, I am "glad" for how it made me depend more on God and let him rebuild me from the inside out. I actually learned I had to get "weaker", not stronger, so He could make me strong.

Question: What is your attitude about your future, and possible remarriage, after going through divorce?
Answer: Certainly, I was "gun shy," but in God's timing the absolute best person for me walked back into my life. I did get remarried two years later, then had my first child one year after that. Today, fourteen years after my dissolution, I have four children and a great life and ministry.

Question: What would you like to add that we did not cover?
Answer: Just that the answer is inside you, not always just bucking up and resolving to be "stronger and smarter next time. Being willing to humble yourself and let God rebuild your life in a way we can't. There's ALWAYS hope when He is in equation, and He truly "works out all things together for good (Romans 8:28)".

FROM THE GUT: Tips for coping during the first year after divorce:
. Turn to God for energy and answers.
. Surround yourself with people who share your faith and values.
. Realize you must get weaker before you can grow stronger again.
. Remember there's always hope (with God).

Healing the Wounds of Divorce - If you're among the one-third of Americans who have divorced, you're likely bearing deep emotional wounds.
by Brad Lewis

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