

Divorce

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”

(Isaiah 43:18–19)

DEFINITIONS

What Is the Biblical Perspective of Marriage?

- **Marriage** is a covenant agreement in which a man and a woman are legally and spiritually joined together as husband and wife.
“She is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his.” (Malachi 2:14–15)
- **Marriage** includes the uniting of two, one male and one female, into one flesh.
“A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24)
- **Marriage** is to be a reflection of God’s covenant commitment to His people.¹
“I [God] will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD.” (Hosea 2:19–20)
- **Marriage** is a picture of Christ’s sacrificial love for His bride, the church.
“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (Ephesians 5:25)
- **Marriage** is designed to be permanent until the death of one of the partners.
“By law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.” (Romans 7:2)
- **Marriage** is a covenant commitment that should never be broken.
“Has not the LORD made them one?... Do not break faith with the wife of your youth.” (Malachi 2:15)

QUESTION: “When I married, my husband and I weren’t Christians. Now that I am a Christian, is it acceptable in God’s eyes to divorce and marry a Christian?”

ANSWER: No. From the beginning, marriage has been an institution initiated by God. Any divorce results in breaking a covenant bond that God has established. The lifetime marriage contract has been trans-cultural from the most pagan tribe to the most advanced civilization.

“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:32)

GOD’S HEART ON MARRIAGE

- God presents marriage as good and worthy of His favor.
“He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.” (Proverbs 18:22)
- God sees the person you married as being the right life partner for you.
“They are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” (Matthew 19:6)

¹ See Bob Burns, *Through the Whirlwind: A Proven Path to Recovery from the Devastation of Divorce* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, 1989), 59–61.

- God portrays marriage as a picture of the sacrificial love of Christ (being willing to lay down your personal rights for your mate).

***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”
(Ephesians 5:25)***

- God is not as concerned with your circumstances as He is with building your character.

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

- God promises to meet all the needs that your mate cannot provide.

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)

What Is the Biblical Perspective of Divorce?

Legal Divorce ... a judicial declaration that terminates the marriage contract²

***“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ ”
(Matthew 5:31)***

Emotional Divorce ... the result of a hardened heart toward one’s mate, creating an inability to give and receive love

“Jesus replied, ‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.’ ” (Matthew 19:8)

QUESTION: “I’ve read that in marriage ‘two will become one flesh’ (Mark 10:8). If my spouse and I get a divorce, would we not simply become two people again?”

ANSWER: Imagine two pieces of construction paper glued together—one red and one blue. If you try to separate the bonded paper, both will tear, leaving blotches of blue on the red and splotches of red on the blue. In marriage, two people “leave and cleave”—they are spiritually glued to each other. If the two are pulled apart, there are consequences that last a lifetime.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” (Mark 10:7–9)

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT WORD DEFINITIONS

Old Testament³

- An Old Testament Hebrew word for the concept of divorce is **shalach**, which means “to send away.” This Hebrew word is used in Jeremiah 3:1, “If a man **divorces** his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again?”
- The Old Testament Hebrew verb **garish** means “to drive out, cast out or put away.” This Hebrew word is used in Numbers 30:9, “Any vow or obligation taken by a widow or **divorced** woman will be binding on her.”
- The Old Testament Hebrew noun **kerithuth**, referring to a legal bill of divorcement, is derived from the root word **karath**, which means “to make a covenant.” This Hebrew word is used in Deuteronomy 24:1, “If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of **divorce**, gives it to her and sends her from his house.”

New Testament⁴

- The New Testament Greek word used for divorce is **apoluo**, which means “put away, release, dismiss or let go.” This Greek word is used in Luke 16:18, “Anyone who **divorces** his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a **divorced** woman commits adultery.”
- Another New Testament Greek word, **apostasion**, is derived from **aphistemi**, which means “to remove, to revolt or to desert.” This Greek word is used in Mark 10:4, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of **divorce** and send her

² Spiros Zodhiates, *What About Divorce?* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 1984), 45.

³ For this section see James Strong, *Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon*, (electronic edition; Online Bible Millennium Edition v. 1.13) ed. (Timnathserah Inc., July 6, 2002).

⁴ For this section see James Strong, *Strong’s Greek Lexicon*, (electronic edition; Online Bible Millennium Edition v. 1.13) ed. (Timnathserah Inc., July 6, 2002).

away.”

GOD’S HEART ON DIVORCE⁵

- God hates divorce.

“I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel.” (Malachi 2:16)

- God does not see legal divorce as dissolving the “one flesh” spiritual bond in marriage.

“Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:32)

- God may close His ears to the prayers of one who breaks a marriage covenant.

“You flood the LORD’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.” (Malachi 2:13–14)

- God does not permit divorce just because a mate is not saved—the unbeliever becomes sanctified through the believing spouse and could become a Christian.

“For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband.... How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?” (1 Corinthians 7:14, 16)

- God’s heart is for reconciliation even if there has been a divorce.

“To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:10–11)

Is There Biblical Provision for Divorce and Remarriage?⁶

BILL OF DIVORCEMENT⁷

- The document of divorce was originally a legal certificate clearing a woman of the stigma of adultery, thus protecting her position in society.
- The legal divorce was created to **protect the innocent**, usually the woman when her husband sent her away for reasons other than adultery. (An adulteress would have been stoned.)
- The divorce document gave women the legal status to remarry.
- If a husband sent his innocent wife away without the Bill of Divorcement and she remarried, he would have caused her to commit adultery because her original marriage vows had never been severed.
- Jesus made it clear that the Bill of Divorcement was a law written only to regulate the result of sin—a hardened heart, which destroyed the most sacred relationship—marriage.

QUESTION: “Is there any provision in the Bible for divorce and remarriage?”

ANSWER: Yes. Most theologians believe that the Bible makes allowance for divorce in two situations.

— **Sexual infidelity**

“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:9)

— **Physical abandonment**

“If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.” (1 Corinthians 7:15)

⁵ For this section see David A. Thompson, *Counseling and Divorce*, Resources for Christian Counseling, ed. Gary R. Collins (Dallas: Word, 1989), 44–45; Ronald M. Supanic and Dennis L. Baker, *When All Else Fails* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1986), 103–15.

⁶ For this section see Edward G. Dobson, *What the Bible Really Says About Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1986), 32–41.

⁷ For this section see Zodhiates, *What About Divorce?* 47, 167–70.

QUESTION: “Before I became a Christian, I divorced and remarried. Should I divorce my second spouse and go back to my first mate?”

ANSWER: No. The Bible clearly says that remarriage to the first mate is unacceptable after marriage to another. God’s heart in giving these commands was centered around the need to caution a man concerning the consequences of putting away his wife.

“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.” (Deuteronomy 24:1–4)

MARITAL UNFAITHFULNESS

- A faithful spouse is given permission to divorce a mate for marital unfaithfulness (fornication).
- This permission was given to protect the faithful spouse.
- The Greek word for marital unfaithfulness is *porneia*, which means “any illicit sexual intercourse.”⁸
- Jesus does not **advise** divorce, but **allows** it. Some people are led to stay in a marriage and pray that the unfaithful spouse will repent.

“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.... I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”
(Matthew 5:32; 19:9)

ABANDONMENT

QUESTION: “I feel that my mate has deserted me emotionally. Is this a biblical reason for divorce?”

ANSWER: No. As painful as rejection is, the abandonment passage in 1 Corinthians refers to the physical desertion by an unbelieving mate.

- The believer should not manipulate the unbeliever to stay in the marriage, nor should the believer manipulate the situation in order to drive the unbeliever away.

“If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so.” (1 Corinthians 7:15)

- The believer is not held accountable or bound if deserted by the unbeliever.

“A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances.” (1 Corinthians 7:15)

- The believer is called by God to live in peace.

“God has called us to live in peace.” (1 Corinthians 7:15)

- The believer should realize that the unbelieving mate might be saved through the marriage relationship.

“How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?” (1 Corinthians 7:16)

- The believer should not eagerly pursue remarriage, but rather should wait for the Lord to reveal His calling.

“Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.” (1 Corinthians 7:17)

Note: Desertion is discussed in Scripture only in reference to an unequally yoked marriage.

“If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save

⁸ Strong, *Strong's Greek Lexicon*.

your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.” (1 Corinthians 7:15–17)

GOD’S HEART ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

- God guards and protects the faithful spouse in a divorce.
“He guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.” (Proverbs 2:8)
- God will accomplish His ultimate purpose for you.
“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)
- God promises to meet all your needs.
“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)
- God requires self-examination when you have experienced divorce.
“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:1–5)
- God’s heart is to bring “new life” out of the devastation of divorce.
“ ‘I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’ ” (Jeremiah 29:11)

QUESTION: “If I have suffered an unwanted divorce, initiated by my mate, am I free to remarry?”

ANSWER: God’s heart is for reconciliation, but if your spouse has remarried, then you are free to marry. However, God has a specific plan for your life, and you need to seek His wisdom when considering remarriage.

“Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.... If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.” (1 Corinthians 7:8–9, 15)

CHARACTERISTICS

QUESTION: “Which is more devastating—divorce or death?”

ANSWER: While divorce and death both can be devastating—sometimes divorce can be more devastating. With death, reminiscing is predominant, but with divorce, rejection runs rampant. With death, memories may be precious, but with divorce, memories are painful. And with death, there is closure, but in divorce, especially when children are involved, the consequences can last a lifetime.

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” (Galatians 6:7)

STAGES OF RESPONSE TO AN UNWANTED DIVORCE

Lost income, long soup lines and loss of lives—it was called The Great Depression. Even the hopes of farmers were dashed as the sky darkened and swarms of locusts devoured the crops. Similar devastation also descends on the heart of a spouse who hears the words, “I want a divorce.” Days become dark and dreams are devoured. The drought never seems to end, yet God tenderly speaks to the one who is deserted.

***“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten.”
(Joel 2:25)***

Turbulence⁹

The initial stage is a whirlwind of emotions including guilt, depression and low self-worth. As the winds of rejection sweep away years of investment, identity is eroded, and the ground you once stood on is swept away. This **time of turbulence** can last up to six months or more.

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”
(Isaiah 43:2)

- **Denial**
“Divorce happens only to other people.... This can’t be happening to me!”
“You don’t really want to go through with this.”
- **Embarrassment**
“I can’t let anyone know this is happening.”
“How can I face my family and friends”
- **Loneliness**
“I never knew I could feel so lonely, even when I’m with others.”
“No one can understand this pain.... I feel like my heart is ripped out.”
- **Rejection**
“Am I so undesirable that you won’t try to make it work?”
“I suppose there is nothing about me to love.”
- **Fear**
“Financially, what is going to happen to me?”
“I’m afraid I’ll be alone the rest of my life.”
- **Anger**
“I hate you for hurting not just me, but also the rest of the family.”
“God, You could have changed his heart.... I know You could have stopped it!”¹⁰

Transition¹¹

A stage of adjustment begins when you recognize the need for change. As you get on with the demands of life, you begin to deal with your emotions honestly and turn your eyes inward for personal growth. If you root out resentment and allow your Redeemer to restore your heart, your life will be fruitful again. This **time of transition** can last from six months to two years or longer.

“Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.” (Psalm 71:20)

- During this time of transition you should be ...
 - **Refusing** negative thought patterns¹²
 - **Recognizing** the divorce is not all “your fault”
 - **Receiving** God’s love and acceptance¹³

⁹ See Sharon Marshall, *When a Friend Gets a Divorce: What Can You Do?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 26–27; Jim Conway and Sally Conway, *Moving On After He Moves Out*, Saltshaker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 85–93; Dandi Daley Knorr, *Splitting Up: When Your Friend Gets a Divorce*, Heart & Hand (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1988), 48–59; Supanic and Baker, *When All Else Fails*, 140–48.

¹⁰ Burns, *Through the Whirlwind*, 77–82.

¹¹ For this section see Marshall, *When a Friend Gets a Divorce*, 42–44; Supanic and Baker, *When All Else Fails*, 148–49; Conway and Conway, *Moving On After He Moves Out*, 119–32.

¹² Terry Hershey, *Beginning Again*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 22.

¹³ Hershey, *Beginning Again*, 75–78.

- **Reflecting** on the relational dynamics of the marriage
- **Repenting** of personal sin and selfishness
- **Relinquishing** your rights and beginning the process of forgiveness
- **Readjusting** to life without a mate

Thriving

This stage flows with deep waters of inner strength. Although many broken hearts are never restored because of bitterness or harboring hatred, new beginnings can bloom in time if your hope has been replanted through knowing God intimately and walking in His ways.

***“I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate.”
(Ezekiel 36:36)***

- During this time of new beginnings you thrive by ...
 - **Knowing** that God is in control of your circumstances
 - **Knowing** that God cares about every detail of your life¹⁴
 - **Knowing** that God has brought you through a character-building process
 - **Knowing** that you can do nothing on your own, but that strength comes from Christ, who lives in you and develops in you His own character
 - **Knowing** that you would not trade who you are now for who you were before the divorce
 - **Knowing** that life is full of joy and promise¹⁵
 - **Knowing** that God wants to use you as a representative of His love in the lives of others

Growth is not a gradual upward line. The normal pattern for emotional, mental and spiritual healing will consist of moving in and out of the three stages of **turbulence**, **transition** and **thriving**. Don't think something is wrong with you or become discouraged when you fall back a few steps or if you seem to be in pain longer than someone else. A broken arm takes time to mend and is tender to the touch, but healing and help is found in the Lord.¹⁶

“Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.” (Jeremiah 17:14)

CAUSES

QUESTION: “Why is the divorce rate so much higher now than it was fifty years ago?”

ANSWER: Situational ethics has rejected moral absolutes (clear-cut right and wrong) by rationalizing sin. The influence of the world on our values makes divorce appear to be not only an acceptable solution but also the best solution to marital difficulties.

“You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

Surface Causes of Divorce¹⁷

- An Adulterous Generation
 - lacking strong moral convictions¹⁸
 - taking advantage of “easy” divorce laws
 - living as man and wife prior to marriage
 - striving for financial and material gain
 - seeking fulfillment in a career

¹⁴ See Hershey, *Beginning Again*, 56–58.

¹⁵ Hershey, *Beginning Again*, 163–65.

¹⁶ Hershey, *Beginning Again*, 26–27.

¹⁷ See Burns, *Through the Whirlwind*, 39–44.

¹⁸ Thompson, *Counseling and Divorce*, 16–18.

- looking for self-centered happiness
- emphasizing personal rights¹⁹
- experiencing identity issues, midlife crisis or empty nest syndrome²⁰
- missing a sense of meaning and purpose to life
- believing in the myth of the ideal marriage

Root Cause of Divorce

- The Hardened Heart

“Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.” (Proverbs 28:14)

COMMON RELATIONAL DYNAMICS THAT OFTEN LEAD TO DIVORCE²¹

The Hardened-hearted Spouse

- Feels dissatisfied with marriage and determines the other partner is at fault
- Allows some event (could be minor) to trigger a desire for a divorce²²
- Does not openly communicate the anger but the dynamic of relating is affected
- Keeps a running mental journal of perceived injustices from partner
- Remains aloof and brooding while looking for a reason to break up the marriage
- Decides suddenly to leave because of a crisis or some outside interest
- Initiates pressure for the partner to get a divorce
- Feels completely justified, becomes resolute and determined to get a divorce

“He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the LORD, the God of Israel.” (2 Chronicles 36:13)

The Heavy-hearted Spouse

- Is completely unaware of partner’s dissatisfaction with the marriage
- Is unaware of the event or of any personal responsibility for wounding partner in some way
- Is aware of a difficult dynamic of relating but copes with partner’s reactions
- Is aware of partner’s negativism but not able to identify the exact problem
- Continues to disappoint partner without being aware of it
- Is in total shock that partner is even contemplating a divorce
- Resists a divorce and attempts behavioral changes
- Feels guilty, becomes defensive and then completely devastated by the breakup of the marriage

“I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.” (Psalm 38:8)

WRONG BELIEF:

“There is no love in my marriage. Life is so short, I have the right to seek happiness and personal fulfillment elsewhere.”

RIGHT BELIEF:

God wants me to love and respect my mate by drawing on the resources of His indwelling love and strength. I will look to God to provide personal fulfillment.

¹⁹ Conway and Conway, *Moving On After He Moves Out*, 48.

²⁰ Conway and Conway, *Moving On After He Moves Out*, 46–48.

²¹ For this section see Thompson, *Counseling and Divorce*, 74–78, 84–85; Burns, *Through the Whirlwind*, 49–52.

²² Conway and Conway, *Moving On After He Moves Out*, 43.

“The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:24)¹

FORGIVE

Follow God’s correction course.²⁴

- Know that nothing happens to you that has not first passed through the loving hands of God.
- Know that God has not caused your spouse to leave, but He is working through the situation for your benefit.
- Know that both you and your spouse share some of the responsibility for the situation.

“He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.” (Proverbs 15:31)

Own your personal sins and seek God’s forgiveness.²⁵

- Do I have a submissive spirit or am I strong willed?
- Do I have a grateful spirit or am I critical and perfectionistic?
- Am I patient and forgiving or am I easily angered?
- Am I honest and trustworthy or do I seek to deceive?
- Do I praise others or do I slander and belittle?

“I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” (Psalm 32:5)

Recognize your need to confess and seek forgiveness.²⁶

- Seek sincerely to understand how you have hurt another.
- Speak only about your offenses.
- Keep your statement simple.

—Example:

“My heart has convicted me of how deeply I have hurt you. Although I am undeserving, I want you to know I am genuinely sorry for (*name the offense*). Will you forgive me?”

“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16)

Give only a good report.²⁷

- Avoid saying any unkind words about your spouse.
- Avoid belittling the other parent in the eyes of your children.
- Avoid seeking sympathy from friends and relatives.
- Avoid self-centered conversations.
- Avoid talking about the difficulties of others without their approval.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Ephesians 4:29)

Identify the unmet needs of your ex-spouse.

(Know your three God-given inner needs.)²⁸

- Was your mate searching for unconditional love?

¹ Hunt, J. (2008). *Biblical Counseling Keys on Divorce: A New Beginning from Brokenness* (1–12). Dallas, TX: Hope For The Heart.

²⁴ For this section see Conway and Conway, *Moving On After He Moves Out*, 94–98 and Smoke, *Living Beyond Divorce*, 43–44.

²⁵ For this section see Burns, *Through the Whirlwind*, 146–47; Welby O’Brien, *Formerly a Wife: A Survival Guide for Women Facing the Pain and Disruption of Divorce* (Camp Hill, PA: Horizon, 1996), 28–30; Jim Smoke, *Growing through Divorce* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 44–45.

²⁶ Hershey, *Beginning Again*, 71–75.

²⁷ Hershey, *Beginning Again*, 33.

²⁸ On the three God-given inner needs, see Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., *Understanding People: Deep Longings for Relationship*, Ministry Resources Library (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 15–16; Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance*, 2nd ed. (Houston, TX: Rapha, 1990), 27–30.

- Did your mate lack a feeling of significance and importance within the marriage?
- Could your mate have needed more *emotional* security within the relationship?

“The wise in heart are called discerning, and pleasant words promote instruction.” (Proverbs 16:21)

Vow to pray for your ex-spouse.²⁹ (or your estranged spouse)

- Pray for the salvation of your ex-spouse.
- Pray for your ex-spouse to let the Lord meet inner needs.
- Pray for Satan to have no power.
- Pray for the bondage of sin to be broken.
- Pray for protection from outside evil influence.
- Pray for godly influences to enter the life of your ex-spouse.
- Pray for godly repentance, even if your ex-spouse remarries.

“I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44)

Expect God to be working on your behalf.

- “Thank You, God, for coming into my life and leading me in the way to go.”

“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:13)

- “Thank You, God, for coming to my defense.”

“He is the God who avenges me, who subdues nations under me.” (Psalm 18:47)

- “Thank You, God, that You bring the guilty to justice.”

“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19)

- “Thank You, God, for promising to provide all my needs.”

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:31–33)

- “Thank You, God, that You answer prayer that is according to Your will.”

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” (1 John 5:14–15)

- “Thank You, God, that You will protect me from trouble.”

“You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.” (Psalm 32:7)

- “Thank You, God, that You will be the other parent to my children.”

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.” (Psalm 68:5)

- “Thank You, God, that You will take the place of my mate.”

“For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.” (Isaiah 54:5)

“Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God

²⁹ See O’Brien, *Formerly a Wife*, 50–52.

***besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.”
(Isaiah 64:4)***

Freedom for New Beginnings

Beginning again may mean an opportunity to rebuild a marriage based on new understanding and new goals, or it may mean rebuilding hope into a life that has been broken by sorrow. In either situation, God has a wonderful new beginning for those whose hearts are given to Him. From the soil of failure sprouts “new life in Christ.”

***“In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free.”
(Psalm 118:5)***

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

- Your new identity (married or single) is in the Lord, not in a position or in another person.³⁰
“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)
- You are complete in Christ, not an incomplete single if you don’t remarry.³¹
“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” (Colossians 2:9–10)
- Your happiness comes from inner attitudes, not outer circumstances.
“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:3–12)
- Your purpose in life, married or single, is to glorify God.
“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20)
- You have the resources to forgive your ex-spouse and others who have hurt you.³²
“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13)
- You have the strength to overcome temptations when you are living in the power of Christ.
“Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (Romans 13:14)
- You are free (if you are single) to be concerned with things of the Lord.
“I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband.” (1 Corinthians 7:32–34)
- You have shared in the sufferings of Christ and can be an effective witness in the lives of others.³³

³⁰ Hershey, *Beginning Again*, 37–46; Smoke, *Living Beyond Divorce*, 29.

³¹ See O’Brien, *Formerly a Wife*, 25.

³² Hershey, *Beginning Again*, 82–84.

“Those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” (1 Peter 4:19)

Freedom to Minister

***“Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”
(1 Timothy 4:12)***

DO’S AND DON’TS FOR HELPING OTHERS³⁴

Don’t counsel others when you are walking through your own spiritual wilderness.³⁵

Do ... Be a living example of having Christ’s strength as your strength.

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:13)

Don’t give advice based on your personal opinion.

Do ... Know God’s heart on marriage and divorce.

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” (Proverbs 14:12)

Don’t encourage dating and remarriage—especially when the former spouse has not remarried.³⁶

Do ... Share God’s heart on reconciliation and contentment.

“If she does [divorce], she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:11)

Don’t criticize or judge the offending spouse.³⁷

Do ... Encourage the wounded spouse to rely on the Lord to bring healing and justice.³⁸

“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.” (Isaiah 42:3)

Don’t reinforce feelings of self-pity, bitterness and injustice.³⁹

Do ... Encourage keeping a journal of feelings, then releasing the pain to the Lord.⁴⁰

***“Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.”
(Psalm 51:6)***

Don’t allow those you counsel to become too dependent on you.

Do ... Help those who are hurting to rely on God’s unconditional love and acceptance.

“The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.’ ” (Jeremiah 31:3)

Don’t be the only source of counsel.⁴¹

Do ... Share how to meditate on God’s Word and listen to God’s voice.

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’ ” (Isaiah 30:21)

Don’t assume that the pain of divorce is over.⁴²

³³ O’Brien, *Formerly a Wife*, 199–200.

³⁴ For this section see Smoke, *Living Beyond Divorce*, 53–121; Thomas A. Whiteman and Randy Petersen, *Starting Over: A Step-by-Step Guide to Help You Rebuild your Life after a Breakup* (Colorado Springs, CO: Piñon, 2001), 146–58.

³⁵ Knorr, *Splitting Up*, 52–54, 98–99.

³⁶ Knorr, *Splitting Up*, 23–24.

³⁷ Knorr, *Splitting Up*, 43–44; Marshall, *When a Friend Gets a Divorce*, 61

³⁸ Marshall, *When a Friend Gets a Divorce*, 85–89.

³⁹ Knorr, *Splitting Up*, 41–43.

⁴⁰ Marshall, *When a Friend Gets a Divorce*, 108–9.

⁴¹ Marshall, *When a Friend Gets a Divorce*, 116–18.

Do ... Reach out during the most difficult times—evenings, anniversaries, holidays and birthdays, social gatherings with couples and at times when the children are with the former spouse.

“Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother’s house when disaster strikes you—better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.”
(Proverbs 27:10)

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”
(2 Corinthians 1:3–4)²

homework

STEPS TO SOLUTION

Key Verses to Memorize

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

(Philippians 4:12–13)

Key Passage to Read and Reread

Psalm 119:25–32

FREEDOM FROM GUILT!

- **Confirm** your need before God. v. 25
“I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word.”
- **Confess** and reflect on your own sins. v. 26
“I recounted my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees.”
- **Commit** yourself to understanding God’s truths. v. 27
“Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.”
- **Confirm** your sorrow about the loss. v. 28
“My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.”
- **Claim** your need for God’s guidance. v. 29
“Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me through your law.”
- **Choose** to follow God’s will for your life. v. 30
“I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws.”
- **Cling** to God’s truths, especially when evil seems to triumph. v. 31
“I hold fast to your statutes, O LORD; do not let me be put to shame.”
- **Cherish** your freedom that is found in the Lord. v. 32
“I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.”

QUESTION: “Why do I feel guilty when I’m not the one who wanted a divorce?”

ANSWER: Even though you are the innocent party, in marriage everyone makes mistakes. There may be un-confessed sin in

⁴² Knorr, *Splitting Up*, 57–59.

² Hunt, J. (2008). *Biblical Counseling Keys on Divorce: A New Beginning from Brokenness* (14–20). Dallas, TX: Hope For The Heart.

your life for which you are accountable.

“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” (Proverbs 28:13)

Freedom in Forgiveness!

Once you have overcome personal guilt, you are free to forgive others. Whether you are working toward a reconciled marriage or painfully accepting your partner’s remarriage, forgiving those who have deeply wounded your heart is the key to unlocking the door to “new beginnings.”²³

“If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

(Matthew 6:14–15)³

(See section on Forgiveness)

²³ Jim Smoke, *Living Beyond Divorce: The Possibilities of Remarriage* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1984), 37–39.

³ Hunt, J. (2008). *Biblical Counseling Keys on Divorce: A New Beginning from Brokenness* (13–14). Dallas, TX: Hope For The Heart.