

3 Spirit-Filled Steps to Take When You Realize You're in a Bad Marriage

Some marriages are just plain bad. Words like sharp knives pierce tender hearts. Affection and sex are demanded, withheld, or used as bait to control and demean. God-talk is mixed with manipulation and shame. Pleas for change go unheeded. Sex and intimacy are sought outside of the marriage covenant. And the list goes on.

The stories are heartbreaking;

- a spouse who watches pornography daily while refusing any affection or sexual advances.
- a wife with mental illness who refuses any help to get better.
- a husband who presents a long written list of “sins” to his wife while refusing to acknowledge any wounds he has caused her.
- a spouse who repeatedly spends the night with someone else.

God intended marriage to be the source of intimacy, a laboratory where we learn to love well. It was never intended to be the source for all our needs to be met; only God can be that. But marriage was given to humankind as a good gift.

And how the enemy of souls has worked to destroy that good gift!

God can and does restore anyone and anything, including the most horrible of marriages, where He is given the opportunity. You cannot control your spouse's vote in the matter, but you can vote for you. And regardless of what happens in your marriage, God can bless and restore *you*.

You are not powerless if you find yourself in a bad marriage. Here are some things within your power to do that will make a difference.

Stay on Your Knees

That goes without saying, and you're probably already praying a lot. But how you pray makes a difference.

Don't *only* ask God to fix things, or to change your spouse. He very well may need to do that! But mostly that's between your spouse and God. Focus more on praying for God to show you His perspective—on your marriage, on your spouse's heart and on your own heart. Ask Him who He needs you to be to your spouse in this season. Seek to know the next step He would have you take in your circumstances.

You desperately need to know God's perspective on things. Is your spouse's heart evil, or "simply" immature? Letting your wounded emotions guide you will only lead to further heartache. God's answer for what you need to do next won't make things easy, but it will be empowering. You may need to back off, set boundaries or change your way of relating. There are times you may even need to leave the marriage. Only God can tell you that.

Stay Filled Up

The emptiness and wounds in your own heart often prevent you from thinking clearly and making wise decisions. A bad marriage constantly drains you, and you need to intentionally get filled up regularly. Your spouse's bad behavior may have left you feeling worthless; that's not how God sees you!

To see things clearly and to have the internal resilience to take positive action you will need healthy mental/emotional nourishment to become wiser and stronger on the inside. That means time with God. It also means time with positive, uplifting people, inspiring and insightful media (books,

podcasts, internet resources and so on), and other activities that nourish your soul.

This is likely to be the most important step for many in a bad marriage. Your vision may be so clouded and your soul so weak that you cannot see any options. Invest all the energy you have in finding and taking uplifting nourishment into your inner being.

Stay Proactive

That doesn't mean trying to manipulate your spouse.

You will always come through a seemingly impossible situation more effectively by focusing on the choices you *do* have. And you *always* have choices.

Those choices will certainly include staying on your knees and staying filled up, as discussed above. They will also include letting the Holy Spirit work on any areas in your character that need maturing. You may have behaved badly as well; don't wallow in guilt. Turn that over to Jesus and do what it takes to become a different person. That may include learning tools of communication, setting boundaries, dealing with your own old baggage and more.

God's restoration will not simply be duck-tape holding two flimsy shattered sinners in a miserable marriage detente. That may be what it feels like right now, but it won't stay that way. As you change, your marriage will change.

If your spouse's heart is truly evil, your growth and becoming more like Jesus will either draw them to Jesus also, or God will demonstrate the truth in a way that will release you from the marriage. If your spouse is basically a person of good will, your growth to become an inviting secure adult may well make it possible for him/her to walk their own such journey with God.

A Different Marriage

Don't settle for things as they are in a bad marriage. You cannot change your spouse! But you can always change you. And changing you will change your marriage.

Doing so won't be easy. I don't know what your marriage will look like in the future, but God does. Go after that! And whatever happens, you can look back and know you invested rightly in the most important human relationship of all.

Your Turn: *Are you in a truly bad marriage? What are you doing about it? Leave a comment below.*

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