

3 Steps to Resolve the Crisis in Your Marriage Jesus' Way

Editor's Note: This is part 1 of a two-part series. Stay tuned for part 2!

Brad and Anna had a happy marriage. They were both devout believers in Jesus, fell madly in love and married soon after college. In time, they began having children, were active in their church and to all appearances seemed to have a peaceful, happy family.

But something dark lurked in the shadows. Brad had an addiction to porn that he couldn't shake. Anna didn't even learn of it until after they were married. Sometimes Brad would talk about it with Anna, but shame kept his struggles mostly secretive. Brad began to lose his resolve to fight temptation and slowly sank even further.

Throughout their marriage, Anna expressed her support. She prayed for Brad and held him accountable when he asked. She cried to God on his behalf but felt powerless to help him. She urged him to see a counselor, but Brad was a private guy and went to the counselor only a couple times. He began to lie, telling Anna he was doing better. In actuality, his thought life grew darker, and eventually, he had his first affair with a co-worker.

Brad loved the Lord, but when the affair started, he began to feel more distant than ever from Christ. He felt trapped. That's when he signed onto a dating app and met a woman he really fell for. The second affair quickly became serious, and Brad's heart toward Anna grew cold.

By the time Anna knew Brad was in a serious affair, it was too late. Brad pulled away from their church, divorced Anna, left her with the kids and remarried.

Why do believers like Brad and Anna sometimes divorce? Christians really want their marriage to work, and yet the percentage of divorce among believers is virtually the same as among unbelievers. Are we missing something?

Yes. We're not following Jesus' path for relational reconciliation. Jesus' way is very clear: "Now if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, then take with you one or two others, that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every word may be established. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:15-17).

If you're married to a believer, then your spouse is also your brother or sister in Christ, and this passage applies to your marriage.

Most Christian marriages fail because of sin that hasn't been handled Jesus' way. Sin is like a deadly cancer that kills marriages when not removed carefully. We must identify sins that are hurting our marriage and go after them.

Start by asking, *Is my spouse sinning against me? Am I sinning against my spouse? What commands of Scripture are being disregarded or violated?* Start by identifying the sin, along with a verse that addresses that sin. Disciples of Jesus are eager to repent and pursue obedience with all their hearts.

Look at some of the things that destroy marriages: rage, railing language, not submitting to one another, adultery, being unkind, abuse, unforgiveness, threatening divorce. They're all sins.

One of our biggest mistakes is to tolerate sin in our marital relationship. When we do, we violate Jesus' command. When our brother or sister—our spouse—sins against us, Jesus commands

us to rebuke them (Luke 17:3), and show them their fault (Matt. 18:15). To refuse to do so is to refuse Jesus. This is one of the most rampant mistakes in Christians marriages today.

Submit to Jesus and stop tolerating sinful behavior in your home. Let's remove from our marriage any sin that hinders love.

In Matthew 18, Jesus gave us three steps resolving serious problems in our marriage. Let's look at each.

Step One: Go to Your Brother or Sister

If your spouse sins against you, go first to them privately and tell them their fault. Explain to them the nature of the sin you think they've committed against you, hear their perspective on the incident and then both of you will hopefully be eager to repent of the ways you were wrong. Bring Matthew 18:15-17 with you to the visit so your spouse understands you're obeying Jesus.

When addressing someone's sin, be gracious, wise, gentle, loving, kind and ready to forgive (Ephesians 4:32). When you bring Matthew 18 to your spouse, you're not stifling the romance of your relationship but are actually giving the romance of your relationship a basis to thrive. Nothing kills romance in a marriage faster than overlooking cancerous sins that undermine the relationship.

What if your spouse doesn't hear you in step one? Then take it to the second step Jesus gave us. By doing so, you're not dishonoring your spouse but are rather honoring both them and Jesus.

Step Two: Take One or Two Witnesses

Jesus said, "But if he does not listen, then take with you one or two others, that by the testimony of two or three witnesses

every word may be established" (Matt. 18:16).

Jesus told us to set up a gracious and kind confrontation. Find one or two witnesses to labor with you in helping your spouse find repentance. This is done when your spouse isn't willing to go with you to consult a pastor or counselor. Jesus is describing something more confrontational than a counseling appointment. He's describing your taking someone with spiritual authority to your spouse who is resisting repentance.

Be thoughtful about who you take to your spouse. Choose someone your spouse honors for their walk with Christ. That person may have some suggestions to help you walk out the crisis more wisely. When the time is right, take them to your spouse. If your spouse is a sincere disciple of Jesus, they will hopefully be won by the appeals of a wise leader in the body of Christ.

When step two is invoked, many situations turn around and move toward healing. But what should you do if your spouse doesn't receive this leader? Jesus gave a third step.

Step Three: Tell It to the Church

Jesus said, "And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (Matt 18:17, NKJV).

When you tell your story to the church, you are asking the church to come to a unified judgment on the matters between you and your spouse. The church stands as a corporate witness before you both, appealing to both of you to receive the judgment of the entire congregation. The witness of the church carries more authority than just one or two leaders. The church's united witness carries an authority that no true disciple of Christ can dismiss. Our hope in implementing this step is that the sinning spouse will come to their senses, submit to the witness of the church and repent.

Bring your appeal to the governing body of your local church, whether elders, pastors or deacons. If your sinning spouse is unwilling to go with you, then present it by yourself. This council of leaders will determine the course of action they'll take in order to pass an informed judgment.

If your sinning spouse is unwilling to receive the judgment of the church council, Jesus said, "Let him be to you as a heathen and a tax collector." In other words, he is to be viewed at that point as an unbeliever—someone who has broken faith, is no longer walking as a disciple of Jesus and needs to be evangelized again.

I'm appealing to local church leadership councils to hear every case brought to them by their members. Even when cases aren't handled perfectly, Jesus honors our efforts to obey His process.

Jesus meant for the local church to serve as a governing body for the health of its members. Leaders in a church court are deeply invested in the health of the church and care deeply for each and every member. The entire process is bathed in the affections and love of Jesus Christ. {eoa}

This article is adapted from Bob Sorge's new book, STUCK: Help For the Troubled Home. For information, visit