

6 Ways to Respond to the Threat of Divorce

There would be so much less disappointment if every time someone tied the knot, it was to the **right person** picked especially by God. But the fact is, when God gave us freedom of choice, He gave us the ability to make bad decisions, including bad decisions about whom to marry.

I remember working with Stephanie two years into her horrible **marriage**. Three years prior, two men came into her life at the same time.

One was everything most women would want in a mate. He wasn't perfect, but his character and maturity were intact.

The other man had a borderline personality disorder—seductive at times and aloof at others. Stephanie picked the one with the personality disorder. Later, she acknowledged her mistake, took responsibility to make the best of the situation and found a way to have a fulfilling life, even though she was married to Mr. Wrong.

If you've made a mistake like the one Stephanie made, you probably feel trapped and discouraged as she did. You may be angry with God for not protecting you or bitter toward your parents because they didn't prepare you to make good decisions.

You might be wondering whether God loves you or cares what happens to you. You know some wives whose husbands were delivered from their "Mr. Wrong-ness." You want that for your **husband**, but it does not seem possible.

There Is Something You Can Do

When you start working on what you can do rather than focusing

on what God is not doing, your **relationship** will probably change. There are actions you can take other than giving up and leaving.

However, if the image of a good marriage is more important to you than fixing your marriage, I don't think you have much **hope** for **change**. Hope comes when you are willing to do whatever it takes to save your marriage and initiate **healing**.

You will first have to discover if your husband has already divorced you and is just waiting for you to fill out the paperwork. Many men **divorce** their wives physically, emotionally and spiritually, even though the marriage still exists legally on paper. Some women live like this for years while he leads a separate life, married to his job, pornography, money or just about anything that allows him to flee intimacy with his wife.

Prayer and intercession can turn the circumstances around, but your husband has to be willing. The worst thing is for you to try to have a marriage with a man who has separated his life from you but has never informed you that he is no longer there.

In Matthew 19, Christ clearly states His desire for marriages to stay together. He does, however, present the exception of adultery.

I am not for divorce. God hates it, and I hate it. But God also hates to see women being abandoned and deceived.

If your husband has already "left," ask him to either complete the paperwork on the divorce he has already declared or work with you to rebuild your marriage. If he agrees to work with you, there are actions you can take that have helped many women and may help you.

Before You Say Goodbye

If your husband is still in the marriage and you are willing to do whatever it takes, you are ready to follow these steps:

1. Obtain counseling and support for you and your children.

You need to find out what it is in you that attracted you to him. Discovering your hidden motivations will strengthen you for a new and dynamic marriage or for the possibility of a painful separation or divorce. Surround yourself with loving and wise female friends who will be there when you need them.

Your children are as confused and hurt as you; maybe more. But they do not have to turn out to be victims of this crisis. A third party can help them resolve their feelings and even grow from the experience.

2. Nag no more. Decide that if anything negative needs to be said to your husband, God will bring someone else along to tell him.

Nagging and negative talk accomplish nothing. Refusing to play his game or respond in anger will instantly change the way he thinks of you.

3. Ask him to get help. Since you are getting help and he is free of your negative comments and demands, you have earned the right to ask him to get some help. He may agree to see your counselor or one of his choosing. If so, go with him.

The important thing is that he gets in front of a trained counselor who will know how to motivate him. The goal is for him to get help in building his weak character while both of you discover how to be there for each other, focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses. If he is not willing to voluntarily get help, you may need a different approach.

4. Use an interventionist. Interventionists are trained to work with people like you who are married to people like him. They are professionals who are skilled in directing people to

get help, and miracles often surround their work.

If you do not want to hire an interventionist, at least work with a friend to help you express your feelings to your mate. Be sure he knows you are willing to work on yourself as well as on the marriage.

Matthew 18 provides a blueprint for confrontation. First you talk to him. If he won't listen to you, you can ask a pastor, church leader or friend to go with you to talk to him.

These options may not be as effective as using an interventionist. But if you choose someone who is mature and directive as well as caring, it may result in your being heard and your husband's getting help.

5. Write letters describing your situation. If the first two approaches produce no response, according to Matthew 18, you are to tell the church.

But there is an alternative to standing up in front of people you may not know and telling them about your situation: writing letters. Writing letters to five or six people who know you and who mean something to him may help.

Inform them about your husband's rage and his hours on the Internet or the pornography you found in his room, and explain the impact it is having on your children. Express your love for your husband and your desire to save the marriage, and then request their help convincing him to get help.

After you have written the letters, hang onto them. Tell him what you wrote, and mention that before you send them you want to be sure he still will not go with you to get help.

Of course if there is a threat of physical abuse, you will want to protect yourself and phone him with your request. But if he is not violent, this step may be the thing that convinces him you love him enough to take bold steps toward

getting help.

6. Consider temporary separation. If he is not willing to get help after you have attempted the above steps, you may need to make the boldest move of your life. Either ask him to leave, or tell him you plan to leave with your children—and then do it.

Yes, this move is disruptive. But it may be the tough choice that startles him into reality and results in change.

When you are not there to be his target, wait on him or provide the conveniences he desires, he may decide that getting help is a small price to pay to have you back.

If you leave, don't go back if he says he will get help when you come home. He won't.

Take your time, and be sure his words are matched by his actions. Coming back together too soon may lead you right back to where you were before.

Submission to God and Each Other

Ephesians 5 does not have just one verse, "Wives, submit to your husbands" (v. 22, NIV). It also gives direction to the husband to love his wife as he loves his own body and instructs both spouses to submit to each other (vv. 21, 23-33).

To respect and honor your husband means doing whatever it takes to help him, rather than leaving him or enabling him to stay broken. Then you both can choose to love each other, submit to each other and honor God in the process.

Don't get out of your marriage prematurely. As a woman of faith you have other options available.

If your marriage is dead, God can resurrect it. Follow His course of action, and you may find new life in a once-dead

marriage.

God can bring hope in even the most hopeless situation. Who knows? One day soon you may look at your spouse and declare that he was Mr. Right all along.

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