

In the Wake of Ashley Madison, Pastor Looks at Divorce

This is part four in a series. Read part 1, part 2 and part 3.

As stated last week: A Focus on the Family newsletter stated that when a research team studied 5,232 married adults who were interviewed in the late 1980s, they discovered that 645 of them were unhappily married. Five years later, these same adults (some divorced, separated, or still married) were interviewed again. The study revealed that two-thirds of the unhappily married spouses who stayed together were actually happier five years later. The opposite is often true for those divorced. Although those who divorce may temporarily escape the pain, divorce introduces new emotional and relational difficulties.

In a nutshell, unless it is severe and/or life threatening, weather the storm—it's worth it. In saying this, I'm not discounting the deep emotional and psychological pain of failed relationships, these pains are real and debilitating ... you can't just "get over it." But I do want to remind you that God makes provision for all of our needs through a relationship with Him.

In the book, *Sacred Thirst*, the author writes, "The bride and groom are standing in front of everyone, looking better than they are ever going to look again, getting so much attention and affirmation. Everybody even stands when they walk in so it's easy to think this marriage, at least, is about them. It's not. Just look at the worn-out parents sitting in the first pew—they understand this. The only reason these parents are still married is because long ago they learned how to

handle the hurt they caused each other. They know that the last thing you ever want to do with hurt is to let it define you.”

This last statement offers one of the most profound points that I’ve read on brokenness. Those who do not allow hurt to entrap them can turn brokenness into an unbreakable force, but those shackled by past pain are truly imprisoned by it. Married or divorced, the walls we build to protect may eventually imprison.

How can we undo the emotional pain that we experience from failed relationships? First, we must understand that it’s not an external fight, it’s an internal struggle: “For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). God works within us by transmitting healthy thoughts into godly actions. Our mind is where battles are either won or lost. Those who do not forgive or release bitterness, anger, and hurt, never experience freedom, happiness, or ‘true’ restoration. It all starts here.

Ephesians 4:31-32 says to “let all bitterness, wrath, anger, outbursts, and blasphemies, with all malice, be taken away from you. And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.” Simply stated, if you fail to forgive, bitterness and anger, though skillfully masked, can and will tarnish relationships. Married, divorced, separated, or single, God can turn brokenness into an unbreakable force, but it is imperative that your mind is renewed by applying biblical principles, beginning with forgiveness.

Those who have walked in true forgiveness know that God restores. It’s been well stated that life makes us bitter or it makes us better—the choice is ours.

A few years ago, I was listening to a syndicated Christian radio program where a Holocaust survivor was interviewed. She described the horrific conditions of the concentration camps and then made a statement I'd never forget. She described the emotional pain and the brokenness she experienced from her divorce as greater than the pain of the concentration camp. Six months later, another guest on the same program, described the pain of losing her husband to cancer. She spoke about how his illness devastated their lives after ten long months of suffering. I was again moved to hear her say that she would have rather lost her husband to death by cancer than divorce.

Unbelievable! Two different women who had gone through more pain than many of us will ever know said that divorce is, or would be, more painful than death. My mind searched for understanding ... why was divorce more devastating than a concentration camp, or cancer? For several weeks I pondered this question. My answer came: Death is a natural process and God makes provision, but the spiritual union of two people was never designed to be broken aside from death—the spirit is vulnerable in divorce and the pain is lasting. We may try to hide the pain that lingers, but it's always there waiting for the opportunity to rise again. Unless God rebuilds the foundation, those divorced may find themselves in the same situation with the second, third, or fourth spouse.

The good news, however, is that both of the women referenced God's healing power. Regardless of what they had endured, God delivered them from emotional scares and feelings of abandonment. He can deliver you as well and break the walls that imprison.

Watch my sermon, "Lord, Remove My Guilt and Shame," on Vimeo.

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