

Jesus' Plan to Solve Your Marriage Crisis

Why do believers 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 1: 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 (Eph 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 1? 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 2: 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 2 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 3: Tell It to the Church

Jesus said, “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. 18:17).

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 like 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.

It's time for believers in troubled marriages to use Jesus' wisdom in Matthew 18 to bring resolve and healing to their home. Jesus' path seems rather confrontational, however, so why would someone want to invoke His three steps?

Let me suggest six reasons to do this.

1. **Obedience.** Jesus gave us Matthew 18:15-17 not as an

option but as a command. He left no room for sins between brethren to fester or be ignored. As disciples of Jesus, we follow His pathway simply because we want to obey Him.

Jesus' way is a fabulous gift to you. He has provided for the church to cover you spiritually so you don't have to weather the storm alone. To obey Him is not burdensome. Rather, His way will lift a burden from you. Don't deny the gracious gift He's provided for your marriage. Do it His way and He'll honor your obedience.

2. **Faith.** A second reason to follow Matthew 18:15-17 is because we believe in Jesus' wisdom. *He alone is wise.*

The unrenewed mind thinks, "If I follow the steps of Matthew 18 in my marriage, it'll be blown apart or become intolerable to stay in." But faith believes His wisdom surpasses ours and produces eternal fruit.

Some people don't follow Jesus' advice here because they feel hopeless about anything changing. In other words, their faith is depleted. Build yourself up, therefore, in your faith (Jude 1:20). Get your eyes back on God and renew your confidence in His ability to heal your marriage.

When we believe and obey the words of Christ, God steps in! (Because God likes faith.) He makes up for our lack, releases His power and does amazing things on our behalf that can leave us astounded.

3. **Peacemaking.** When you follow Matthew 18:15-17, you're being a *peacemaker* in your marriage. Where anger, resentment, suspicion, frustration and anxiety have damaged the peace in a marriage, repentance will restore it.

Outbursts of wrath kill the peace in a home. We must confess such sins so we can see the peace of Christ restored to our

home.

To make peace is to declare war on all the divides and separates.

4. **Protection.** When a home is in good spiritual order, it's guarded by an encampment of angels that circle everyone in the home with safety (Ps. 34:7). Sin can compromise that spiritual perimeter around a believing family. Follow Matthew 18:15-17, therefore, to re-establish a spiritual hedge around your home.

Don't be shocked when your home becomes a battleground. Satan has declared war on marriages and families. The war is real. He wants to break up your marriage and devastate your children.

Parents, you're the gatekeepers of your family. Withstand every attempt of darkness to compromise the spiritual security of your home. Do it for the sake of your children.

5. **Love.** Another reason to do Matthew 18:15-17 is for the sake of love. Let your love for your spouse and Jesus win the day. When sin has caused a breach in love, go after the breach. You're not attacking your spouse, you're pursuing love.

Tackle the issues head-on, early in the journey, to preserve love and restore the romance of your marriage.

6. **Preservation.** A final reason to obey Matthew 18:15-17 is to avert divorce and preserve your marriage. I consider this the greatest benefit of following Jesus' counsel. When we resolve conflicts Jesus' way, our courage can save the marriage. Passivity is deadly, but courage is redemptive. Doing it Jesus' way doesn't *guarantee* that your spouse will be won to the wisdom of Christ, but it provides *the best chance* of saving the marriage.

I'm presenting this message to militate against divorce and to

fight for marriage—*your* marriage.

We have a vision—for radiant wives who are nurtured and loved by their husbands, for respected husbands who demonstrate integrity in business and family, for upright children who establish healthy families of their own and for grandparents who glory in the legacy they grant their descendants. It's a vision worth fighting for. {eo}

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