

Moving Forward When God Doesn't Restore Your Marriage

Sometimes all you've got is not enough. Sometimes even God can't fix it. Sometimes all your tears and work and prayers and love fall flat and your marriage fails anyway.

Before you get upset at "even God can't fix it," hear me out.

Lysa TerKeurst recently made public that her marriage is ending. Only God and Lysa know all the details, but based on what she has made public she did everything right. She tried and cried and prayed and got expert help and gave it everything she had. She waited and tried again and prayed some more. She consistently sought to be the person God needed her to be in her marriage. And her marriage is still ending.

Many of you, my readers and friends, have or are experiencing a failed marriage. I've talked with some of you just this week who are going through a divorce right now. It's one of those times when grief, pain, guilt, shame, confusion, relief and a million other emotions chase after one another in your soul.

I've been criticized for painting a too-rosy picture of working through marriage problems and for asserting that any marriage can be fixed. But that's not what I believe.

It's no failure on God's part that some marriages cannot be saved. You're not perfect, but if you're reading this it's likely you have at least some measure of an open heart, so it certainly doesn't have to be your "fault." But you and God are not the only parties in a marriage. Your spouse gets a vote too.

And here's the most painful truth:

Neither you nor God can make the choice for your spouse.

God can restore anyone or anything—if the human hearts involved give Him permission to do so. But sometimes He isn't given that opportunity. God didn't want robots worshiping Him. He wanted beings around Him who freely chose to offer Him their love and worship.

And so He gave human beings a free will.

God couldn't save one-third of the angels in heaven from rebellion and destruction. He can't save people who persistently and with full knowledge refuse His offer of salvation. And He can't save your marriage if your spouse (or you) persistently refuses to allow Him to do what only He can do. If your spouse's heart is closed it may be the end.

I have known marriages that God restored after infidelity, addiction and abuse. And I know those who nearly died from staying too long. I also know those who experienced relief, healing and renewed purpose after the end of a destructive marriage.

How long do you wait? How much abuse do you have to take? How many times of infidelity must you endure? How bad does it have to be before you leave? When have you prayed and cried and tried enough? How many times do you have to get help?

Only God and you know the answers to those questions. And if you're in that situation right now, get some help. A lot of it. But don't let anyone else play junior Holy Spirit in presuming to tell you what you should do.

It always hurts. The end of a marriage will cause ripping and tearing and loss and grief. You will be different as a result. You will wrestle with shame. Some people will see you differently. If you have children, they will be affected. Your failed marriage will always be a part of you and your story.

The church has often done a poor job of walking with those who are going through the end of a failed marriage and its

aftermath. Some have used theology as a weapon rather than a tool for transformation. In many circles, there are believers who are sincerely trying to do better, and for that we can all be grateful.

The end of a marriage does not have to mean the end of your life. As real as the trauma and pain are, God has a way of taking our brokenness and turning it into bread whereby others are fed. God will not leave you after your marriage ends. He will be there to heal, transform, and use you if you give Him that opportunity.

Marriage is not easy. Marriage vows are serious and are to be treated seriously. Divorce is not a fix. But neither is divorce the unpardonable sin.

I have two pleas from deep in my heart.

1. If your marriage is failed or failing, listen for God's voice.

Guilt is not a reason to stay. Unhappiness is not a reason to leave. Your decision(s) will have permanent consequences, and if there's ever a time you need to hear God's voice it's now.

Get all the help and counsel you can, but base your decisions on what you hear from God. I believe there are times when God releases someone from a marriage. I've said that to people at times. If He releases you, although it will still hurt, your healing will be facilitated.

Spend time in His presence. Lay everything out before Him—tears, trauma, confusion, grief, desires, hopes, hopelessness, everything. Give Him the burdens on your heart. And remain there long enough to sense His peace and hear His voice. He loves you, sees you, understands you and He will not leave you alone. If He guides you to stay, He will give you the strength to do so. If He releases you from your marriage, you are truly free.

2. If you know someone with a failed marriage, be Christ to them.

“The Servant Song” reads in part, “Let me hold the Christ-light for you in the nighttime of your fear.” That is who we are to be to each other in the body of Christ.

Although you cannot fix, you can be there. You can be the hands and feet and voice of Christ to one who may not be able to hear Him any other way. Your ministry of presence to one going through such trauma is invaluable. You cannot carry their pain, but you can ease the burden. You can lend your faith as support. You can listen. You can cry with and be with and touch.

And you can keep being there in the days, weeks, months, and possibly years it takes to move past a failed marriage and begin truly living again.

Most of all, remember that even if your spouse’s choices preclude your marriage being restored, God can still restore you.

This is one of those pains where we are drawn to eternity, and the end of all pain and failure and tears. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” {eo}

*Reprinted with permission from Dr. Carol Ministries. **Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley** is an OB-Gyn physician, Doctor of Ministry, author and speaker.*