

Separated? This Author's Been There and Now Helps Others Move Forward

A home ripped apart by one spouse leaving reverberates with a host of unanswered questions. Simple answers don't exist—heartrending complexities do. In the midst of the turmoil, reconciliation may seem out of reach. But there is still hope for those who are willing to fight for their marriages. In this practical, scripturally grounded book on the subject of separation, men and women who are separated but hopeful for restoration will discover life-changing truths about God, themselves and their marriages.

Fighting for Your Marriage While Separated by Linda W. Rooks explores practical answers for men and women in the midst of a marriage crisis, guiding them step by step toward hope and a positive outcome, even when fighting for the marriage alone.

This is part 2 of an interview with Linda W. Rooks. For part 1, [click here](#).

Q: When one spouse first makes the move to separate, should the one left behind be diligent in trying to reconcile or give them some space in the beginning? How much time and space should be given?

The natural thing for the one left behind is to want answers, especially if the separation comes as a surprise (he or she is most likely in shock). It's a very painful experience, and it's natural to want to know why and what the leaving spouse plans to do. They want to talk about what's happening so the spouse can return home again.

When a spouse leaves the home, he or she is usually running from conflict—either in the home or raging within themselves.

Running after them with questions only drives them further away because they don't know what to say. Either they don't have answers, or if they do, they're undoubtedly reacting out of their emotions at the moment, which are unreliable and often hurtful.

The best thing you can do is to give them space and time to clear their head and work through their confusion. That means not calling, texting or emailing for awhile. When you do have contact again, instead of pressing them with questions, say something positive and affirming. Let them know you are willing to give them space. If you don't hear from them for a significant period of time, it's OK to then hold out an olive branch and let them know you're still there, you care and want to be supportive as they think things through.

Q: How does the intimacy of Jesus bring about true hope for men and women seeking restoration in their marriages? What part does personal spiritual growth play in the process?

A separation is very lonely and painful. The one left behind is in the limbo of not knowing what's going to happen or what they can depend on. It's easy to become obsessed with circumstances and desperate for help. In their loneliness and despair, they will hopefully cry out to God for help. If they are Christians, that comes more naturally, but for the unchurched, they may discover a new revelation of God's comfort and love when they have little else to hang onto.

Many times in the midst of pain, a person who is separated discovers the deep love of Jesus—perhaps for the first time. For, truly, the intimacy of Jesus is what holds a person up during this desperate time. Learning to focus on Jesus instead of the painful circumstances can move them on towards hope and a positive outcome. Realizing God loves them and has the answers gives them comfort there is somewhere to go with their doubts and fears.

When they are finally able to truly let go and surrender everything to God, that is when healing can truly begin—both in themselves and in the marriage. God is not surprised by what is happening because He has the big picture. He knows what needs to happen for healing to take place. He can guide them along the way. Letting go and surrendering everything to God—allowing Jesus to fill their hearts with His peace—can open wide the door to restoration and freedom.

Q: What advice would you give readers interested in starting marital counseling? What steps should they avoid or what pitfalls should they look out for in the counseling world?

It's very important to realize there is a difference between individual counseling and marital counseling. Not all counselors are trained in marriage counseling. Marriage counseling is more difficult and complex because the counselor has to minister to three different clients at the same time—the husband, the wife and the marriage. When conflict arises in the session, a therapist not specifically trained in marriage counseling may not know what to do. The greatest danger is that an untrained counselor may think a situation is hopeless simply because they don't understand how to unravel the complex relationship issues. In contrast, a trained marriage counselor can help you identify the dynamics that are undermining the relationship and help you make necessary changes.

If you are in a counseling relationship, you should beware of certain red flags that can lead you toward hopelessness. These red flags include the counselor beginning to take sides, diagnosing one of you (or the marriage) with pathologizing labels or sabotaging the marriage with provocative questions or comments such as, "I can't believe you're still married to him."

For these reasons, it's imperative to make sure you have a trained marriage counselor who is truly trying to work with

you to restore your marriage and reach your relationship goals.

Q: What can friends and family walking alongside loved ones in the midst of a marriage crisis do to offer support? How about church leaders and Christian community?

The first and most important thing a friend can do is listen. A person who is separated is dealing with lots of confusion. Being able to talk about their feelings and what is happening in a safe environment can help them unravel their thoughts and come to a better place. As you listen, you want to make sure they feel safe. If they make comments that seem irrational or out of character, realize this is not unusual for a person in this situation. Don't judge them or offer too much advice. Give them your support and love and just let them talk.

If you can't imagine how a person can deal with a situation like your friend is going through, refrain from telling them so. Don't say things such as "You'll find someone else," "You can do better," or "You need to move on." Comments like that are discouraging and can move a person toward divorce. Instead, give them hope.

Encourage your friend to give the process time so healing can take place. Encourage them to put their spouse on the back burner and focus on God. (Otherwise, they can easily become obsessed with the situation.) Also encourage them to trust Him to show the things He may want them to do and see in themselves. Remind him or her that God is a big God who has answers they don't have and can guide them through this difficult time.

Church leaders and the Christian community need to understand there is hope, even in the most difficult situations. Too often, if people haven't survived a difficult marital crisis themselves or don't know others who have, they can't imagine how it can be done. Consequently, they offer discouraging

comments that actually help the person find a way “out” of the marriage. Church leaders need to make a more concerted effort to connect people in marital crisis to peers who have dealt with these situations themselves. They need to understand the difference between marriage counseling and regular individual counseling. They need to familiarize themselves with programs like Retrouvaille and Marriage 911 and encourage the formation of these programs in their churches and their community. When people run into roadblocks in their marriages, the church has not been diligent enough to offer alternatives to help them through the crisis.

Q: How can parents best protect the hearts of their children and provide stability for them during a separation?

Many of us have heard if the parent does fine, the children will do fine. Many marriage counselors are now recognizing that this is simply untrue. Divorce and separation do affect the children. Knowing how to protect a child’s heart is very important, and something we are probably unprepared to do. I certainly was and would have loved to have wise counsel about how to help my children through this time.

In general, try to maintain routines and keep things as normal as possible. Take care of yourself so you can be a healthy, supportive parent to your child. Find healthy outlets for your emotions so you don’t pile them onto your children. You may need to consider counseling for yourself to give you healthy outlets for expressing your emotions so your children don’t feel the brunt of them.

Reassure your children that what is happening between you and your spouse is not their fault and that you both still love them. Encourage your children to feel free to express both positive and negative feelings around you and help them to find an outlet or tools to help them express these feelings. Also help them find a safe person to talk to so they can express feelings they may not want to share with you. It may

be a good idea to find a counselor for them if they don't have a family member or adult friend to talk to.

It's important for you to take certain precautions to protect your children from getting intertwined in the problems between you and your mate. Be sure not to speak disrespectfully about your spouse or tell your children inappropriate details about the situation. Also, don't interrogate your child about what your spouse is doing, and don't expect your child to become your confidant by asking him or her for advice. Allow your child to deal with his own emotions without becoming entangled in yours. Understand that he or she is hurting too, and may say or do things that seem hurtful to you. If this happens, be patient and supportive of them.

Pray with them about the situation and encourage them to trust God to help them during this time. Let them see you leaning on God and encourage them to do the same.

Q: What did your prayer life look like on your journey toward marital wholeness?

At the beginning, my prayers were focused on saving my marriage and bringing my husband home, but over time I realized God wanted to take me deeper. First, He wanted me to see things in myself I needed to change. Our marriage problems weren't all my husband's fault, and God began to show me my part in the marriage breakdown.

God also wanted me to realize I didn't need anything—even my husband or my marriage—for my life to be complete. All I really needed was Him. I had to grow into a sweet dependence on Him, where He could give me the strength to do what I needed to do. I had to realize His love was enough for me. My prayer life became centered on who God is, the creator of the universe, the Alpha and Omega, who holds everything in His hands. My love for God became deeper and my trust in Him more comforting.

I became more aware of the fact that I was in a spiritual battle, and that God would fight this battle for me as I depended on Him and called on the name of Jesus to go before me into battle. Praising God through prayer and music became important to me. The most significant prayer for me was when I could really let go and surrender everything to God, then pray for my husband—not to come home but for him to find spiritual healing and be fully restored to God. Realizing I could “let go” of my husband and my marriage (and still be all right) so God could do what He needed to do was a big and important part of my journey.

Q: In your work with marriages that are separated, you’ve seen many marriages reconciled. Are there ways to go about reconciling that are more successful than others?

One common mistake is trying to reconcile too quickly. My husband and I did this ourselves near the beginning of our separation. When our first counselor tried to get us to reconcile, we did, but my husband left again two months later. The reason was that no change had taken place in us. The same problems that had caused us to separate still existed.

Going back to earlier in our discussion, when a separation occurs, something in the marriage is broken. Both people need to make changes for the marriage to be healed. I don’t mean making changes to just please the other person, but allowing God to make the changes in each person that He wants to make. Before a reconciliation can successfully take place, it’s important to make sure real change has taken place and you are both on a growth path. Also, until a real heart relationship with God has taken place in each of you, the reconciliation may still be on rocky ground. To have a healthy marriage, you need two healthy people in it, and this is something to keep in mind when a couple is getting ready to reconcile. So before reconciling, it may be good to take it slow by spending time together and getting to know each other in this new way.

During the third year of our separation, my husband and I went through a period of time when we were just friends. We spent time together without talking about our issues and without physical intimacy, just enjoying each other's company and getting to know each other again. At the time, we didn't realize how important this was, but we now realize we were creating safety for one another. This is very important in the process of reconciling. Couples need to create safety for each other. In most of the stories I share in my book, the couples went through a similar period of friendship before fully reconciling their marriages.

When you are ready to reconcile, it's good to start talking about how you can create safety for one another in the relationship and how you can do marriage better. Couples may want to consider counseling or attending a program like Retrouvaille or Marriage 911.

Q: If you could tell separated couples just one thing, what would it be?

Give God the time He needs to make the changes He wants to make in each of you. Surrender the situation to God and keep your focus on Him. {eoa}

Linda W. Rooks, *the author of Broken Heart on Hold: Surviving Separation and Fighting for Your Marriage While Separated: A Practical Guide for the Brokenhearted, knows what it's like to fight for your marriage. After being married for more than 20 years, she and her husband were separated for three years before reuniting. They have now been married over 40 years. Today, not only is their marriage thriving, but together they lead a crisis marriage class in Central Florida. The Rookses have two married daughters and five grandchildren.*

Learn more about Linda W. Rooks and her ministry at and follow her on Facebook (Broken Heart on Hold) and Twitter (@linda_rooks).