

She Endured a 3-Year Marital Separation; Now She Offers Hope to Other Struggling Couples

*It is estimated that upwards of 80 percent of separated couples ultimately seek out a divorce. Despite the sobering statistics, it is possible to reconcile and build a stronger, lasting marriage. In **Fighting for Your Marriage While Separated: A Practical Guide for the Brokenhearted** (New Growth Press/Feb. 25, 2019), Linda W. Rooks offers practical answers to readers' questions, guiding them to a positive outcome for their marriage.*

As separation and divorce increasingly become what many feel to be the only solutions in many troubled marriages, Rooks encourages couples to continue to fight for restoration and healing. As a survivor of a broken marriage herself, Rooks understands that readers need specific, biblical and practical help navigating their new, unwanted journey by faith. She and her husband, Marv, were married for over 20 years when then they faced a marriage crisis and separated. After three years of separation, they have now been reunited for 20 years.

This is part 1 of an interview with author Linda W. Rooks. Watch for part 2, coming soon!

Q: You write *Fighting for Your Marriage While Separated* from experience. Can you share a little bit about the path that led you and your husband to separation? When you separated, did you anticipate divorcing or was it a mutual goal to work towards reconciliation?

My husband and I had a very happy marriage at the beginning,

and although we had typical problems, we still had a happy family life with our two daughters. We were both active in church, involved with the children and did a lot together as a family. Despite the good times, however, we weren't resolving problems. We had different family backgrounds when it came to dealing with problems. My husband came from a family where no one ever argued. It was a "peace at all costs" kind of mentality. I came from a family that was very expressive, and people openly expressed different opinions and feelings. In our marriage, I would express my feelings; my husband didn't. When we had an argument, a pattern gradually emerged in which my husband would often walk out the door and leave for a while. Then when he came back, we'd both act as though nothing had happened. Since the problems weren't being resolved, bitterness began to grow beneath the surface, and those unresolved problems and bitterness started eating away at our marriage.

Eventually, arguments became more heated, and our relationship became more tense. My husband seemed angrier with me on a regular basis, and I didn't understand why. We continued to have more and more arguments that resulted in him walking out the door. Finally, one Easter, while I was in the midst of cooking the Easter dinner, we had another argument, and my husband walked out the door and left. But this time, he didn't come back. At first, I thought he was just making a point and would be back in a day or two. When it stretched out into three or four days, I began to get worried. A mutual friend went to talk to him and reported back to me that my husband needed time and planned to be gone for a while. I was in shock. It was the most painful experience I ever had. Even though we'd had problems, I thought he loved me and would never leave me. I walked around in a fog like one of the living dead. I was in literal, physical pain. My emotions went up and down like a roller coaster from tears and depression to anger, then back to tears again.

A few weeks later, we visited a counselor who tried to get us back together. We did get back together for a couple of months, but then my husband left again, and that time, he said he was thinking about getting a divorce. It was four months before I saw him again.

Q: How long was your separation, and when did you realize it was time to move forward with your marriage together?

My husband and I were separated for three years. It was never anything I wanted, and I agonized over the time apart because I didn't understand it. Like most people, I wanted to resolve everything and have him move back home as quickly as possible. But one day when I was pouring my heart out to a friend, she said, "Linda, he's confused and needs to figure himself out. Tell him to take a year if he needs it to figure out what he wants." I was shocked at her suggestion, and when I told her so, she responded, "What's a year in a whole lifetime? If it takes a year for him to figure things out, then you have 30 more happy years together after that, wouldn't it be worth it?" It took three years, but it was definitely worth it.

When a separation occurs, what we don't realize is there's a lot of healing that needs to happen before a marriage can successfully be restored. Change needs to take place, and it takes time for people to make changes or even recognize the need for changes. The more severe the issues and the longer the problems have plagued the marriage, the longer it will probably take. For us, we went back and forth over those three years until we had inadvertently created safety for one another in the relationship. When we both felt safe and spent time together in a kind of friendship, we rediscovered our love for one another and knew it was time to think about getting back together.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you were given during your separation?

The best piece of advice I got during that time was from a friend who told me to “put my husband on the back burner and focus on God and what He wanted to show me.” It’s so easy to become fixated on your spouse and your circumstances. You want your spouse to come home, and your mind spins around in circles, trying to understand how to make that happen and what caused him or her to leave. You become obsessed with thinking about it and paralyzed from actually doing anything.

By “putting your spouse on the back burner and focusing on God,” you allow your mind to focus on the one who can really help you. God has answers for you. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.” This Scripture gives us the answer to our dilemma. By focusing on God, He can show us what we need to do, what changes we need to make and how we should proceed during this time. He also gives us His peace.

Q: A lot of people think that once separation occurs, the marriage is over. What does it look like to fight for your marriage?

There’s a common misconception that if a separation occurs, the next step is probably divorce. Many marriages have survived a separation and gone on to thrive afterwards. Divorce does not have to happen. If even one person in the marriage wants to fight for their marriage, there is a good chance they can be successful in restoring it. However, the goal should not be to bring back the old marriage, but to create a brand new one between the same two spouses.

Separation occurs because something in the marriage is broken. Something isn’t working, and the dynamics need to change. The first thing a person needs to do is step back and take a fresh look at what’s been happening. For the partner who’s been left behind, he or she must begin by giving the spouse who left space to clear their head and realize that his or her feelings

can change—even if they say they aren't in love anymore. Spouses left behind need to put their mates on the back burner and focus on God so they can take care of themselves. Otherwise, they can become obsessed with their circumstances—which is pretty much the default mode in this kind of crisis. Being intentional about keeping focused on God will move them onto a more constructive and rewarding path.

To fight for your marriage, change needs to take place, and it starts with God. Often, we try to keep trying to solve problems in the same way we've done it in the past. When that doesn't work, we want to give up. God can open our eyes to negative reactionary circles that may have been keeping our marriage off balance. He can show us changes we need to make in ourselves, which not only strengthen our marriages, but make us healthier individuals and better communicators.

The most important part of the battle, however, takes place on our knees. God has answers we do not have. He sees the big picture. He can lead us one day at a time and show us how to fight for our marriages His way and in His timing.

Q: What happens when one spouse wants to reconcile, but the other does not? Do you think most couples give up too easily?

When one spouse doesn't want to reconcile, the one who does often thinks it's hopeless. They don't see how they can bring about reconciliation by themselves. There's a popular adage that says, "It takes two to reconcile." While it's true it does take two to take that final step, many times, one person who is committed to the marriage and willing to fight for it can bring about reconciliation.

In the crisis marriage classes my husband and I lead, many people come alone to the class. Yet even though they come alone, many of them ultimately are able to reconcile. When one person begins to make changes, it causes the other person to respond differently. It's always thrilling to see what happens

when one spouse comes alone and is serious about doing the work to become all that God wants them to be, and then seeing the response of their spouse. On several occasions, we've seen the resistant spouse so impressed with the changes they've seen in the one who came to the class, that they decided to come to the class the following year to see how it will affect them. Ultimately, they end up reconciling.

I believe far too many couples give up too easily. They need to give it to God and let Him do the work in each person He wants to do.

Q: Can you share how you gathered the stories of others that are included in the book?

Many of the stories in *Fighting for Your Marriage while Separated* come from people who have come to our classes. Others come from those who have emailed me after reading my first book, *Broken Heart on Hold*. A few of them were stories shared with me at a previous time. In most cases, I journeyed with these people over a long period of time and witnessed firsthand the broken beginnings and the beautiful endings to their stories. I become very attached to the people I minister to both online and in person, and it's thrilling to hear what happens when a breakthrough occurs.

When I asked permission to use their stories, it was wonderful to see how willing these people were to let me do so. In every case, each of these people had drawn closer to God and saw God transform them as individuals. In most cases, I interviewed the couples, and they reviewed the stories for accuracy before they became part of the book. In other cases, I used actual emails. Everyone saw sharing their story as an opportunity to use the pain they had experienced to give other people hope. They tell me that even though it was probably the hardest time in their lives, it was also life-changing in drawing them closer to God.

Although most are stories of reconciliation, there are a few where the marriage was not restored, but the individual experienced personal restoration because of having to cling to God in the midst of their struggle.

Q: How does one navigate separation with a spouse who has abandoned his or her faith and is rebelling against God? Would your book still be a helpful resource to this individual?

A separation doesn't always take place in separate households. Sometimes a separation can take place within the same home. You may be living in the same house, but you feel like you are living two separate lives and going in different directions. If a spouse is abandoning his faith or rebelling against God, this might be such a time. *Fighting for Your Marriage while Separated* addresses this as well.

In this situation, you can't change your spouse, but there are things you can do to help him or her find their way back to God. The first is to pray for your spouse to come back to God. Identify and pray specifically against strongholds causing your spouse to turn away from God. Learn to speak encouraging words that can build your spouse up. Ephesians 4:29 says to "build others up according to their needs." Our words and actions can be a testimony to the one who is rebelling against God. We can be a priest to them and a conduit for Christ's love. Our love can show them Christ's love. {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).