

Where to Turn If Your Marriage Fails

Don't let divorce ruin the rest of your life. These 10 guidelines will put you on the path to restoration.

1. Pursue biblical counseling. The objective guidance of a professional counselor will help you process your pain in a healthy way while walking you through a systematic pathway to recovery. A good counselor can open your eyes to issues lurking under the surface that need to be exposed. But there's a catch: You must be honest, vulnerable and willing to take responsibility for counseling to help.

Local mental health agencies make referrals to Christian therapists, as do many churches. Try asking friends if they have had a positive experience with a counselor and get their referral.

2. Surround yourself with support. Ecclesiastes 4:10 says, "If one falls down, his friend can help him up." A good friend will walk with you through deep waters and help you get to the other side.

Consider finding a support group in your community. Divorce Care is one such group that meets throughout the country. Check their Web site at www.divorcecare.org.

3. Stay connected to your church. Don't pull away from people during crisis. You need them now more than ever. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves exhorting one another" (Heb. 10:25, NKJV).

Great healing can occur simply by being in an atmosphere of praise and worship. God can use those around you to speak encouragement.

4. Read books that will give you insight. One of the most helpful is the Fresh Start Series. The Fresh Start Divorce Recovery Workbook and Fresh Start: 8 Principles for Starting Over When Your Relationships Don't Work are available from your Christian bookstore or through Internet vendors.

5. Beware of rebound relationships. Good friends are an invaluable support, but wrong relationships only breed disaster. Proverbs 12:26 says, "The righteous should choose his friends carefully."

Don't jump into a serious dating relationship before you have fully dealt with the issues surrounding your marriage and divorce. If you do, you'll carry old baggage into your new relationship and risk repeating past mistakes.

6. Give healing time. Emotional healing doesn't happen overnight—it is a process. But if you give God time, it is a process that works. "A wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment, because for every matter there is a time and judgment, though the misery of man increases greatly" (Eccl. 8:5-6). Be patient. God is at work, even when you don't feel it.

7. Let the Holy Spirit minister to your emotions. You may feel like you are riding an emotional roller coaster. You'll be making progress one day, then the next day you'll struggle with rejection or anger. This is a normal part of healing.

In the Psalms we find that David embraced emotional moments—he didn't stuff them. He expressed himself freely, pouring out his heart to God. The Holy Spirit can help you if you walk through the emotions with Him.

8. Don't let condemnation cripple you. Divorce is not the unpardonable sin. Christ offers forgiveness, but you must walk in that forgiveness. Voices of condemnation will whisper in your ear. But this is never from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will convict us, but He instills hope at the same time. Condemnation, however, is accompanied by spirits of fear, hopelessness or despair. The best way to combat condemnation is to dwell on Scriptures of forgiveness and promise. Write verses on 3-by-5 cards and keep them handy. When the enemy attacks, you'll have your weapons ready.

9. Be open to remarriage. Some people take Jesus' statements on divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19 out of context and subsequently throw future happiness out the window. They believe that if they remarry, they are committing adultery.

But it should be noted that Jesus was not giving an exhaustive teaching on divorce and remarriage. He was not trying to list all of the situations in which divorce would be an acceptable, if tragic, outcome.

The Pharisees, seeking to trap Christ in His own words, asked Him if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife "for any and every reason." In so many words, Jesus answered no. His subsequent statements confronted frivolous divorce. He was not making an all-inclusive statement outlawing remarriage for those who have suffered divorce yet have repented of wrongdoing and have been healed. Be open to God bringing the love He has designed into your life.

10. Believe that God can still use you. Many people write themselves off after divorce, thinking they have ruined their testimony forever. But does that sound like a redemptive God?

God used David even after he committed adultery and murder. He used Peter even after he denied Christ three times. Jesus refused to let stones be cast at a woman caught in sexual infidelity.

God is in the restoration business. If you have taken responsibility and are living in honesty and repentance, God wants to use you to minister to others.

