

Why Bestselling Marriage Author Now Tells Us 'When to Walk Away'

Pastor, scholar and spiritual writer Gary Thomas is well-known as the author of the bestselling book, *Sacred Marriage*, whose premise and subtitle, "What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?" has changed countless marriages. *Sacred Marriage* teaches people to embrace, not run from, their difficulties and what God has to teach them through those issues.

With years of that kind of thinking, teaching and experience behind him, what could have motivated Thomas to write *When to Walk Away*, his most recent book? "I think [before now] I was reading the Bible a little subjectively," Thomas tells host Marti Pieper on the *Hope for Your Marriage* series on *Charisma News*. "My thought was, if I could just launch this great offense, be surrendered to the Lord, walk in obedience, be guided by the Holy Spirit, gain experience and understand Scripture, I [could] just play on offense, offense, offense, and everything [would] fall open in front of me.

"It never even occurred to me the need to play spiritual defense against toxic people," Thomas says. As he ran into some toxic relationships in his own life, friends encouraged him to go back to Scripture and study what God has to say on this topic. "A counselor friend ... just encouraged me to go to the book of Luke and count how many times Jesus chose to walk away from someone, to let somebody walk away from Him," Thomas says.

The author admits that, at one time in his life, he would have considered himself a failure if "there wasn't complete victory in the situation. And when I saw how many times in the four

Gospels together—I counted 41 citations where Jesus let somebody walk away without chasing after Him, or Jesus Himself chose to walk away when [people] wanted to do Him harm or they were just closed-minded—Jesus just needed to move on.

“It gave me a new freedom, and it helped me look at the strategy with which Jesus lived His life. I think too often I got bogged down in wanting to be known as the nicest person in the world. Jesus didn’t seem to wear that worry; instead, He was focused on being strategic and accomplishing His heavenly Father’s will.”

Thomas emphasizes, however, that a difficult relationship, including a difficult marriage, does not always fit the definition of “toxic.” “The difference with a toxic relationship is that two people aren’t growing through the difficult,” Thomas says. “A toxic relationship is somebody who wants to hurt you. They’re slowly destroying you. They’re undercutting your sense of peace and security and sanity. They’re masters at gaslighting, which means they make you feel crazy for stating the truth.”

But Thomas says ultimately, the true danger of letting toxic relationships, marital or otherwise, continue is the threat they pose to your destiny in Christ. “God uses people who have this vibrant experience with God, they have a piece of who God is, they have a joy in what God has provided, a confidence not in themselves, but in the truth of God’s Word, the power of the Holy Spirit to work through them,” he explains. “When somebody is destroying all of that, they’re not just assaulting the relationship; they’re assaulting your ministry. And that’s a very different situation, where, basically, it’s undercutting everything that God created you to be.”

Listen to the entire podcast to learn more of what the Bible says about *When to Walk Away*.