

# Hope for a Difficult or Abusive Marriage

by Kurt Bruner, *The Center for Strong Families*

Those who marry will have troubles. That's what Paul told the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 7:28). Even the best couples can struggle to protect their marriage vows. But what happens when marriage troubles become unbearable? Is there a point at which couples should end a bad marriage? Or is there hope for something better? Walk through the following steps as you prayerfully evaluate your situation.

## **STEP ONE: Discern Minor from Major Trouble**

Unfortunately, many marriages end today over troubles that could have been overcome. University of Texas researcher Norval Glenn has found that divorces today are often blamed on problems such as "lack of commitment," "too much conflict and arguing," "unrealistic expectations" and "lack of preparation." These are problems that couples can and should work to overcome. Despite what friends, family, or popular culture might say, these issues are no reason to end a marriage—especially in light of the serious long-term impact of divorce on your children.

In their book, *The Case for Marriage*, Maggie Gallagher and Linda Waite explain that couples who think their only options are to either divorce or be miserable often find things getting better if they'll just stick it out. In fact, almost 80% of those who were very unhappy in their marriage yet stayed together described themselves as very happy just five years later!

## **STEP TWO: Anticipate the Hope after the Trouble**

Major trouble occurs when someone either abuses or abandons their role in a marriage—when they break faith with their spouse and violate their vows. While God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), He permits it for marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:1-8). In God's grace, He allows men and women whose spouses have been unfaithful to start over.

However, God is in the business of helping couples redeem what many would see as a hopeless situation. "Even marriages that have faced one or more of the big 'A's—abuse, affairs, or addictions—can be saved," says Mitch Temple, a licensed counselor who directs Focus on the Family's marriage ministry.

Temple has led numerous intensive counseling sessions with couples that faced these major challenges and even though they had biblical grounds for divorce, they found a way to save their marriages.

## **STEP THREE: If Needed, Protect Yourself and Children**

If your relationship is marked by physical abuse, you may find yourself confused, frightened, and unsure about what to do. The most important thing you can do right now is take steps to protect yourself and your children from harm. Even if you want to save your marriage, you should not risk the safety of your children or yourself. A period of structured and therapeutic separation may be needed and can make it possible for you to get the help your marriage needs while making your family less vulnerable.

## **STEP FOUR: Seek Guidance—Don't Go It Alone**

Whatever situation you're in, don't struggle through a difficult marriage alone. You need the church body like never before—for perspective and advice, counseling, encouragement, and hope for God's redemption. Take advantage of the Going Further resources and services of this church for people in your situation.

## **GOING FURTHER – Resources**

(Available at the Bellevue Christian Bookstore and Library)

### **Recommended Books:**

*Love and Respect* (by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs) discusses a powerful biblical model for each spouse in understanding and meeting the other's most deeply felt needs.

*Breaking the Cycle of Divorce* (by Dr. John Trent) helps those who had no model of marriage stability break the cycle by creating a successful relationship.

*Love Must be Tough* (by Dr. James Dobson) offers hope for marriages in crisis—including those who have an unfaithful spouse.

# A Difficult Marriage

## *Finding Hope and Help*

### Recommended Website:

**TroubledWith.com** contains articles, Q&A, resources and referrals related to family problems.

Search for the features on *“Physical and Verbal Abuse”* and the various topics under *“Relationships”* that address dealing with a troubled marriage.

### GOING FURTHER – Church Support

**Bellevue’s Biblical Counseling Ministry** strives to provide a Biblical approach to problem solving and relationship resolution during all counseling. The goal is that individuals, couples, and families might grow in their relationships with the Lord and learn to apply Biblical principles in their everyday walk and in interaction with others. The ultimate goal is Christ-likeness. For more information, call (901)347-5830.

**Bellevue’s Care Groups** offer support and guidance to those facing this life crisis and the daily challenges it brings. Groups are offered each semester to address the issues that face individuals, couples, and families. There is no fee to attend. Some groups have optional curriculum materials available for purchase. Childcare is provided for groups that meet on Wednesday evenings. You do not have to be a Bellevue member to attend. For more information about Care Groups, call (901)347-5830.

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