

COVENANT KEEPERS

“Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles”

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What should you do when your spouse walks out the door?

If your spouse has just left you or has asked you to leave, you are most likely in the midst of great turmoil within your heart and mind. There are many questions racing through your head, *What should I do? How should I respond? Can this relationship be reconciled? If so, how?*

This will not be an easy time for you, nor will there be easy answers to your dilemma. However, God is in the business of reconciling people unto Himself everyday, and because of this, He understands how to reconcile your marital relationship. He has revealed the methods and principles that you need in His Word. If you will open your heart to His counsel, the reconciliation process can begin. This can be a time of great change and healing in your life and marriage if you will only yield to His plan. What should you do to see the work begin?

1. Examine yourself. This is the first and most important step you must take. Instead of dwelling on your mate's faults and failures, begin by examining your own. This is what Jesus told His disciples to do when they became involved in a conflict or were tempted to condemn others. He taught them, *“First, remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye”* (Matt. 7:5). There is no way that you will be able to see the conflicts in your marriage clearly until you have first taken this step. Self-examination is not an easy step but it is an essential one if reconciliation is ever to become a reality.

What are *your* faults? How have these failures contributed to this break-up?

What have you said or done that has destroyed the love between you and your mate? Or, what have you failed to do that has caused this break-up? I suggest that you write these problems in your behavior, words, or attitudes on paper. This will help you in several ways. First, it will enable you to be specific in prayer to God for change in these areas. Also, listing your own faults helps you to remember and focus on the issues you need to confess to your mate.

Self-examination and confession are the fastest way to reconciliation. If you acknowledge your faults, then your mate doesn't have to spend time attempting to prove to you where you've failed. If both partners take this action reconciliation is easy. Therefore, ask God for truth in the inward parts of your heart and identify your faults.

2. Don't get any harder. Hardness of heart is the primary reason why this break-up has occurred in the first place. Jesus identified a callous heart as that which destroys marital relationships. He explained to His disciples that it was only the *“hardness of your hearts”* that God even allowed Moses to give instruction concerning divorce (Matt. 19:8).

This hardening process has resulted because of your failure to obey His commands to seek reconciliation and real solutions to the day-to-day conflicts that have occurred. These unresolved issues have slowly built up and hardened you, and have ultimately separated you from the intimacy you once had with your spouse and with Christ.

Therefore, deal quickly with the state of your heart. Ask God to convict and soften you, so that you might turn from your resentment, anger, pride, or an unwillingness to work at the relationship. Ask Him for a brokenness inside as you see your own faults and failures. Request a willingness to do anything God requires of you in order to reconcile your marriage. What will help you get this broken and contrite heart?



Leaving always seems easier than staying and working it out!

3. Renew your relationship with the Lord. Once you recognize your faults and humble yourself before God, you must seek the only One who can change your heart and, ultimately, your behavior. You must understand that every marital problem is first a spiritual problem. Whenever there is a failure to love, to give in a sacrificial manner, to lovingly communicate, to render and receive forgiveness, or to be understanding, there is a basic spiritual problem in your walk with Christ. Now of course, at times, everyone fails in these responsibilities, but when there is a consistent deficiency without reconciliation in these areas, it is because there is a basic weakness in your relationship with Christ. You either don't see your personal problems or you are choosing not to obey God in some way. Therefore, to see any real change in your ability to resolve these problem areas in your life there must be a restoration and a deepening of your love relationship with Christ.

The renewing of your relationship with

She is your companion and your wife by covenant Mal. 2:14

Him will enable you to experience the power you need for change. Only the Holy Spirit can transform a person into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). As you surrender to Him on a daily basis, He will conform your attitudes and your behavior to be in harmony with His. Beloved, don't try to change yourself by your own willpower. You need only to ask and yield, and your heavenly Father will give you the inner strength of His Spirit (Luke 11:13). Won't you ask today?

4. Don't create more conflicts. If you truly want reconciliation with your spouse, one of the most important steps is to be sure you don't create new conflicts while you are separated. Even though a couple may be separated from each other, the conflicts can continue to mount up. This is a great mistake. This means you must stop the harassing phone calls, showing up unannounced to make some new demand, or trying to force your will upon your mate. When these behaviors continue to occur, your spouse begins to wonder if he or she should even try to reconcile. Your spouse considers these additional conflicts as conformation that nothing has changed in your life and that it would be fruitless to reconcile.

You must understand that every marital problem is first a spiritual problem.

However, I believe the conflicts will cease if an individual is truly examining his or her own heart before God. When you realize your personal fault and begin dealing with your hardness of heart, you can't help but want to reconcile. You naturally want to stop the battling. Remember, Solomon's exhortation, "*Stop contention before a quarrel starts*" (Prov. 17:14). Be assured, His grace is sufficient to enable you to control your anger and your tongue (2 Cor. 12:9).

5. Begin making changes in your life. While you are seeking reconciliation with your mate, begin actively dealing with your own faults. Go back to the list that you made and undertake the most important issue of conflict between you and your mate. Begin to study the

Scriptures on this subject and start learning all you can regarding what God requires. If you are unsure exactly how to do this, seek out a friend that is more knowledgeable in the Word of God for help. Then ask God for the wisdom to apply these truths in your life. Continue asking for the empowering of God's Spirit to fill your heart with the strength to walk in love. Become a doer of the Word and not merely a hearer (James 1:22-25). Taking this action will encourage reconciliation with your mate and assure that when the relationship is restored it is built on a new foundation.

6. Keep the right motivation. What should be your ultimate motivation for making these changes? Is it to get your spouse back? Is it to be free of the uncomfortable circumstances you're living in at the moment? Why should you be seeking to restore your relationship? It must primarily be because you want to please God by being obedient to His Word. Paul encouraged the Thessalonian church how they "*ought to walk and to please God*" (1Thess. 4:1). Be sure this is your ultimate motivation.

What is the most practical thing you can do to please the Lord? Seek reconciliation! Jesus said, "*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother*" (Matt. 18:15). In addition He encouraged, "*If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift*" (Matt. 5:23,24). Are you willing to go and seek reconciliation simply to be obedient to God? If you want to please the Lord this is what you must do.

Steps to take that will help in your reconciliation.

1. First determine what's negotiable and what's not. In most marital break-ups there are usually many issues that have lead to the deadlock. You must first determine which are issues that you might compromise with your spouse and which you cannot. Obviously, moral

issues and biblical principles cannot be compromised. To compromise over them would be disobedience to God and a rejection of His lordship over your life. God's Word teaches us that we should deny "*ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age*" (Titus 2:12). Therefore, you must reject any ungodly or unrighteous behavior as unacceptable. Only confession and repentance can resolve those issues.

However, when you and your spouse disagree on nonmoral or personal issues, you must find a workable compromise that satisfies both partners. How can you find this compromise? Choose to walk in love by determining where you are being offensive or unreasonable in your demands. Choose to give. This is the counsel Paul gave to the church at Rome. This church had many disputes over nonmoral issues in which members were offending others continually. His counsel was to "*pursue the things that make for peace and the things by which one may edify another*" (Rom. 14:19). He declared that if you are choosing to offend your brother "*you are no longer walking in love*" (Rom. 14:15).

Only the Holy Spirit can transform a person into the image of Christ.

Therefore, specifically determine those areas in which loving compromise needs to be worked out. Where you have failed to walk in love by a poor attitude, cutting words, or insensitive behavior, repent and confess it to your spouse. Be willing to ask forgiveness for each offensive or unrighteous act. Once you settle these issues between you, it becomes much easier to focus on what is really important. The moral and biblical issues should always be the priority in your discussions for reconciliation.

2. Find a biblical counselor. Solomon declared that "*where there is no counsel, the people fall...Without counsel, plans go awry*" (Prov. 11:14, 15:22). If you find it impossible to resolve these issues on your own, find a biblical counselor to

help. Many times it takes an objective third party to get involved in the details of your conflicts for complete reconciliation to occur. Jesus recognized this and instructed His disciples that they may have to take witnesses with them or even the elders of the church to resolve some matters (Matt. 18:16,17). Don't underestimate the help that someone well-versed in Scripture can give as you attempt to determine areas of compromise or personal repentance. You have to recognize that we all have those blind spots in our view of ourselves. Remember Solomon's acknowledgment that *"every way of a man is right in his own eyes"* (Prov. 21:2). A good counselor will help you to see your personal needs and the steps to resolving these issues in your life.

Continue asking for the empowering of God's Spirit to fill your heart with the strength to walk in love.

However, let me give a few words of warning in finding a counselor. Don't begin talking to all your friends and family to get this counsel. The more counselors you have, the greater potential for contradictory advice. Also, it is very possible that some of your friends will tend to get on your side and not give the best counsel. In addition, if close friends or family get all involved in the details of your mate's faults and failures he or she will find it difficult to continue an open relationship with these people once you've reconciled. Therefore, it's best that you keep the intimate details of your marriage confined to an objective third party who will keep all information confidential.

In addition, it is essential that anyone you counsel with must also attempt to speak to your spouse to get the other side of the story. Preferably your counselor will bring both of you together in order to hear both sides at the same time. I have found that it is impossible to effectively counsel one person in a marriage because

there are always two sides to every conflict. Remember the wisdom of Solomon on this subject: *"The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him"* (Prov. 18:17). Therefore, be willing to let your spouse and your counselor examine you and your behavior with the Word of God.

It should go without saying that this counselor should be a Christian and use the Word of God alone as his source for any encouragement or instruction. God's Word is profitable to teach, convict, correct, and discipline us to righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). His Word is powerful and able to cut to the heart and reveal our thoughts and motives (Heb. 4:12). Don't settle for the wisdom of men when you can have the insight of the very God of heaven to motivate and instruct you. Don't forget David's admonition to steer clear of the *"counsel of the ungodly"* (Ps. 1:1). Therefore, seek a godly counselor that will truly instruct you in the way God would have you walk.

3. Approach with confession. When you approach your spouse by letter or in person, come with humility and confession (James 5:16). At this juncture your attitude is of the utmost importance. If you come with hardness, criticism, and new charges, your attempt to reconcile will be fruitless. Instead, approach with humility, acknowledging your own faults first. This attitude and gesture will be perceived by your spouse as a sincere attempt to reconcile.

The benefit in taking this approach is that it immediately disarms your spouse and defuses his or her anger. Why? Because if you first make personal confessions of failure then your mate doesn't have to prove that you have done wrong. You just admitted it. Likewise, if you will ask forgiveness for your insensitivity and unloving actions, there will be an immediate softening in your mate's heart. Tenderness of heart is always a fundamental prerequisite for any reconciliation to occur. Therefore, come with confession, repentance, and the request for forgiveness. Remember Paul's encouragement, *"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you"* (Eph. 4:32).

4. Don't talk it, walk it. It's easy to simply say the things your spouse wants to hear as you attempt to reconcile, but if

you want lasting reconciliation and a relationship that grows, there must be more than mere words. I see this mistake repeatedly in my counseling ministry. Men and women will promise anything if only their spouse will allow them to come home. When it becomes apparent that there has been little or no change, the couple separates again. If you don't want this to happen in your relationship, then make sure you make the changes you've promised. Your actions must be the loudest voice your mate hears. Don't talk about your love, but demonstrate it to your spouse.

Seek a godly counselor that will truly instruct you in the way God would have you walk.

However, many think, *Is it realistic for me to expect real and lasting change in my spouse? Should my mate expect it in me?* Yes! If you have both sincerely looked at yourself and your personal failures and repented before God, radical change must result. This is the fruit of true repentance according to Scripture. This was the message that Paul the apostle preached during his ministry. He declared that people *"should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance"* (Acts 26:20). Notice how Paul defined true repentance: When a person turns away from sin, he must also turn to God, which is where the power comes from to accomplish the acts that prove repentance is real. The word *befitting* refers to action that has comparable worth or stands up to its profession. Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable for both partners to expect real and lasting change if sincere repentance has taken place.

This kind of change is the only thing that will bring lasting reconciliation in your marriage. Without it, there will only be a short interlude to the fighting and the break-ups.

5. Be patient. With the couples that I have helped to reconcile, I have found

patience an invaluable asset because no two individuals are ready to forgive and begin to work together at the same time. Usually one partner is always more willing than the other. This requires patience and longsuffering on the part of the other. If the more willing partner fails to show patience at this point and begins to pressure and force, all can be lost.

The only way you can truly work on your problems is to work on them together.

What causes you to be patient and allow your spouse the time he or she needs? Love. *"Love suffers long and is kind"* (1 Cor. 13:4). The fruit of the Holy Spirit is patience. As the Spirit rules in your heart He will motivate you to be patient. After you have been patient, you will continue to be kind as well. There will be no huffing and puffing, rolling of the eyes, or explosions of anger when your mate asks for some time to think over your requests.

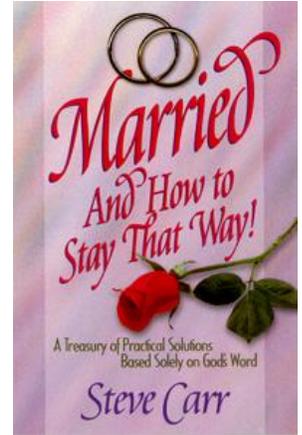
However, let me warn those of you who desire more time: Don't drag out a period of separation to the point of discouragement. This can be equally harmful. You may think, *But how can I know if he (or she) has really changed enough to go back together?* There are no easy answers here. However, statistics reveal that the longer a couple stays apart, the more difficult it is for them to reconcile. That is why Jesus said, *"Agree with your adversary quickly"* (Matt. 5:25). Paul also declared that prolonged separation is unwise; as it puts both partners under an increased sexual temptation (1 Cor. 7:2-5). Therefore, don't be disobedient to the Lord on this issue. Remember, the only way you can truly work on your problems is to work on them *together*. The only way you can be sure real change is occurring is to be under the same roof. The only exception to this counsel would be if there are unsafe or illegal circumstances continuing in your home. These situations must be discussed with your pastor or counselor.

In conclusion, let me encourage you to seek reconciliation. God can heal any broken heart. Jesus has promised that He possesses the ability (Luke 4:18). He can also transform the hardest heart. All He is waiting for is for you to surrender. If you are willing, God can do great and awesome things in you and your spouse. However, it takes two willing hearts to bring about the lasting change that is needed for a successful marriage. If you are willing, won't you begin to take these steps today? Only by obeying Him in your personal life will you ever see what's possible. Remember, *"With God all things are possible"* (Matt. 19:26).

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