

DIVORCE PREVENTION

1. **HOW TO RESTORE LOVE.** In EVERY relationship, the degree of love for each other waxes and wanes. That is human nature, and includes our relationships with God, others and ourselves. Millions divorce because “We fell out of love!” The Church of Ephesus, in the first century A.D., was a good church, but “fell out of love” with Jesus, so He gave them three steps to restore their love for Him, and the same three steps work in marriages that I have professionally counseled (from Revelation 2:1-5):
 - a. Look how far you have fallen! (In other words, remember the things you and your mate did when you were more intensely “in love” with each other.)
 - b. Turn back to me. (In other words, make up your mind to repent for losing touch with the importance and priority of maintaining love in your marriage and make a vow to do the best you can to “preserve and restore” the relationship.)
 - c. Do the works you did at first. (In other words, if you DO the things you did when you were madly in love—the comments, the romantic touches, the compliments, the “I love you’s,” the fellowship, etc.—then the feelings of love will follow. Don’t merely try to FEEL love, but rather do the first works and the feelings of love will come back to you, and possibly to your mate.)

2. **GET PROFESSIONAL HELP IF NEEDED.** We don’t mind seeing doctors for bronchitis, pains that creep up in our bodies, or other diseases; and we don’t mind bringing in professional consultants to help us “fix” our businesses when they show signs of financial weaknesses. But many of us are too proud to go to a professional Christian marriage therapist to analyze what problems have accidentally (or sometimes willfully) crept into our marriages to make them temporarily “sick.” God teaches us in Proverbs 13:10 (NLT), “Pride leads to conflict; those who take advice are wise.” Call us at 1-888-7-CLINIC and let us help you find a good marriage counselor near you. If we don’t know one in your area, call 1-800-A FAMILY (Focus on the Family) for a referral. Get professional help to make your marriage fun and more loving again.

3. **ANALYZE YOUR RELATIONSHIP.** Most marital conflicts are repetitions of what we saw growing up. Eighty-five percent of our adult personalities are laid down by our 6th birthday, but “I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13), no matter how old we are. Analyze how your families-of-origin affect your marriage today. Statistically, a girl growing up with an alcoholic father will marry someone (often without even knowing consciously that she is doing so) who is also, or will become, an alcoholic or drug addict. And if her alcoholic mate gets help and recovers, there is a 50% chance she will divorce him and marry another alcoholic. We tend to repeat whatever we got used to growing up. Most people marry someone quite similar to the parent of the opposite sex, or else the most dominant parent, without even realizing how little control they had over their choice. I once treated a rich, beautiful, successful movie star for depression after her seventh straight divorce. She thought each guy was a great guy that she had “fallen in love with” before each marriage. But all seven husbands ran around on her, bragged about it, and beat her up if she complained about it. All seven men were also drug addicts or alcoholics. She thought she either had really “bad luck” or that “all men are alike.” I finally convinced her that it was neither. Her father was a physically abusive alcoholic who had sexually abused her for years, and it was as though she had “unconscious antennas” that went *zap* when she met men like her father, falling into “love at first sight.” She had psychological/spiritual blinders on, like we all do to some extent, to their true nature until after each marriage. She was codependent and was not in control of her choices of mates. Her unresolved unconscious choices were controlling her, so she married these seven for several unconscious reasons: a. It’s what she was used to—abuse, b. Children who suffer abuse feel like trash, like they deserve to be abused, no matter how successful they become, c. She wanted to fix her father, so unconsciously married men she could fix to symbolically fix her father, d. She never experienced the love of a father, so craved it, but naively picked men similar to her father to “fill the hole in her soul,” and e. She had a life of repressed rage and bitterness toward her abusive father, and unconsciously chose men she could take it out on in subtle ways.

Our initial love for our mate is often just a “Second hand emotion” being transferred from a parent to our mate. I love Tina Turner’s most famous song, “What’s love got to do, got to do with it? What’s love but a second hand emotion?” What wisdom and depth in that song, sung by a wise woman who learned the truth after suffering her own abusive marriage. So, my advice, as a psychiatrist, is to analyze your own marriage and realize how precious little either of you know about why you have conflicts—most of which stems from the “sins of your parents” or other family dynamics. Even in cases of adultery, the “other woman” in a man’s life is more often his relationship with his over-indulgent or abusive mother than the other woman, who is largely incidental. “If the truth sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36) So if you discover that you married partially or largely for the wrong reasons, which most couples do to some extent or another, then look at the truth and get whatever help you need to grow past that and make the best of the marriage you are in without putting up with any abuse.

Any two people who both want a marriage to work can build a genuinely loving and happy marriage with the right kind of help. But it takes two to tango. God will not make your mate change, but he will help you to change.

4. **DON'T WAIT FOR YOUR MATE TO COME THROUGH FOR YOU AND MEET YOUR NEEDS.** Get your own needs met in Biblically acceptable ways. Any need your mate meets is a bonus! If you lower your expectations, you will seldom be disappointed! Make your life as happy as possible, developing friends, a good relationship with God, making a contribution to the lives of others, having fun activities, etc.
5. **DO YOUR PART TO SAVE THE MARRIAGE.** "As much as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." (Romans 12:18) If you do everything you can to preserve your marriage, your mate may divorce you anyway, but your life will be better off either way. And you will live with a good conscience, knowing you have done what you can to save the marriage—forgiving your mate who leaves and turning any vengeful feelings over to God (Romans 12:1). Turn him or her loose to God and get him/her out of your brain as much as you can, after grieving for a while. I strongly suggest that you read *BOUNDARIES IN MARRIAGE* by my good friends, Dr. John Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud, to learn how to develop independence, freedom from codependency, and protection from abuse, all of which actually help build legitimate, honest and stronger marriages, or at least a happy and meaningful life, even if your mate divorces you for not letting him/her control you.
6. **YOU CANNOT CHANGE YOUR MATE, AND GOD WILL NOT FORCE YOUR MATE TO DO THE RIGHT THING, BUT HERE IS WHAT YOU CAN DO THAT WILL HAVE THE BEST CHANCE OF CHANGING YOUR MATE FOR THE BETTER.** There are no guarantees that your mate will change, but we learn in I Peter 3 some principles that will have the best chance of possibly improving the behavior and attitude of your mate. Psychiatry research teaches us, of course, since the Bible is always true, the very same things.
 - a. Teach your mate over a long period of time by your own humble but honest example, not by words.
 - b. Don't preach to your mate. No "should" or "shouldn'ts!" If you use these two words with your mate, you are being your mate's parent, and your mate needs an equal partner, not another parent.
 - c. Nothing turns off any romantic desires more than feeling like you have found yourself married, at least psychologically or unconsciously, to your own parent.
 - d. Replace "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" with *feelings*—"I feel sad about, or angry, or happy, or afraid, or lonely, or...." Your mate can and will argue with you about any should or shouldn't—even if he/she knows you are right—it's human nature—but your mate cannot argue with you about how you feel, even if he/she disagrees with the appropriateness of those feelings.

7. MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE DAILY. This will help you develop the mind of Christ, which will give your marriage the best chance. And if your mate leaves you anyway (God will *never force your mate* to do the right thing or He would have robots in Heaven with him), having the mind of Christ will keep you from spending the rest of your life bitter, vengeful, and miserable. You will be just as happy, or happier, single rather than married if you have the mind of Christ and have done what you can to preserve your marriage. Meditation will also help you discover your unconscious feelings and motives and childhood misperceptions and dynamics. God teaches us in Hebrews 4:12 that God's word is quick and powerful, and able to reveal to us our "innermost (which is all the word "unconscious" means anyway) thoughts." King David taught us in Psalm 139 that, regardless of what your mate may think of you, you were *personally* designed in your mother's womb, were fearfully and wonderfully made, designed specifically by God Himself. We also learn there that when you fell asleep last night, God was thinking about you and that when you woke up this morning, God was still thinking about you, and will think about you *specifically* so many times today that you cannot even count them. With one arm, it says, he hugs you, and with the other arm he leads you in the direction you should go. (Listen to Him, not religious legalists or liberals who hate marriage.) David ends Psalm 139 with a beautiful prayer in which he begs God to reveal David's own "innermost thoughts (the unconscious thoughts, feelings and motives again)," so David can walk, truthfully, in a way that is pleasing to God. Pray that prayer yourself. Do what you can to preserve and improve your marriage and it will have the greatest chance of improving. Whether your mate cooperates or leaves, you will be a better person, more equipped to love and be loved, understanding yourself and not naïve enough to make the same mistake twice.

The divorce rate is approximately 50% for first marriages, 66% for second, 80% for third, and 90% for fourth. But that is only because most people never figure out how much their unconscious dictates their lives and how much the truth can set one free. The divorce rate is 78% for any couple who lives together first—probably because people who are strong enough to delay gratification are more likely to be strong enough to grow in a marriage. Every ten years of a marriage, you are, in a way, married to someone different—not just like he/she was a decade earlier. People change, so we need to be patient enough to make those adjustments. People who live together first are less likely to change. Plus, if you insist on no sex until marriage, which is *very very*, important (even though God forgives all sins), people who pretend to love you to get sex will drop by the wayside, and you are more likely to end up with someone who loves you for who you really are. Committed Christian couples who pray together have the best, most satisfying sex lives and emotional intimacy.

In summary, the best ways to prevent divorce are to understand yourself; meditate on God's Word for guidance; be careful to understand why you are about to marry someone in the first place (or why you have already made that plunge); obey the Great Commandment to love God, self, and others; have boundaries to protect yourself from any form of abuse or your own co-dependencies; lower your

expectations to a reasonable degree; and teach your mate as much as possible by your example, not by preaching. And if it still fails, you haven't. So don't have false guilt or lay guilt trips on anyone else. Move on with your life either single or remarried, but making better choices if and only if you learn from the principles of Scripture listed above.

P.S. Some mates have genetic, biochemical mental disorders, (such as paranoia, always thinking they are right, condescending, controlling, ascribing evil motives to others, delusionally grandiose, delusionally paranoid about imagined unfaithfulness—especially if the mate is unfaithful him/herself and projects it to the other spouse—or other ideas of imagined persecution, and he/she may even hear audible voices that are not there.) I have seen many cases where dopamine medications correct these chemical imbalances within a week or two and the same mate turns into a wonderful, loving mate. Convincing a paranoid person to admit their need for help may be difficult and could be totally rejected. But if your mate has this or any other mental disorder, suggesting a temporary separation may be necessary to help them decide that they must get help. I have seen amazing changes take place through my years counseling those in our Outpatient and Day Programs.