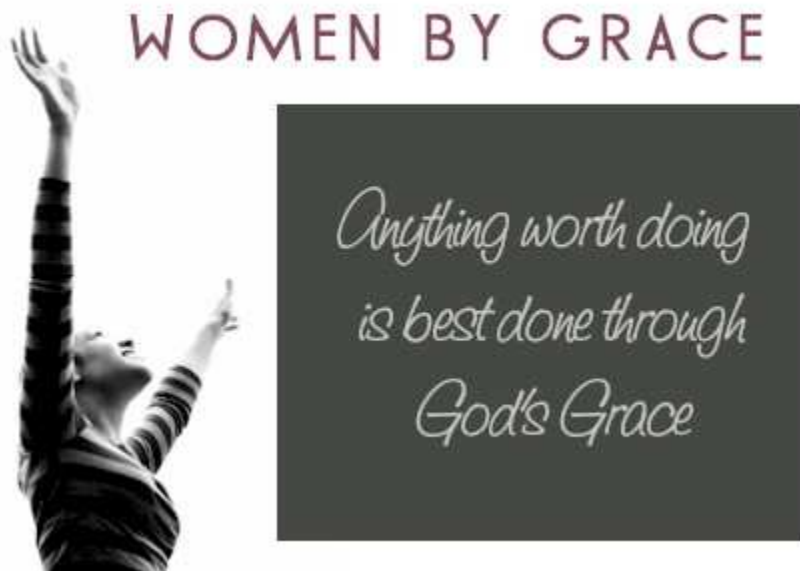


# THERE IS HOPE FOR YOUR MARRIAGE



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If your marriage is on the rocks you might not find it easy to believe. You may not feel it. You may not even want it right now. But it's true. There truly is hope for your marriage. Let's just get one thing straight right from the start.

### **Divorce is not okay with God.**

*Unless you are in the very, very small section of people for whom divorce is necessary for self preservation, you are not going to be receiving a "get out of marriage free card" from your heavenly Father.*

I have heard Christian people who are getting a divorce say something like this:

*"God understands my situation and I don't believe that he wants me to be so unhappy."*

God does understand your situation. He is God after all. And of course he does not want you to be unhappy. But He knows something that you don't know. Divorce isn't going to make you happy.

*"Yeah, but I am in that very, very small section of people."*

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**Note:** Physical & extreme emotional abuse is not part of God's plan for marriage. If you are living in fear of your spouse, you need help now. This booklet is not for you. Make an appointment to talk to your Pastor today. Don't wait.

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### **God created man and woman and He ordained marriage.**

In Genesis Chapter 2 it says that man and woman will be joined together and united as one.

Did you know that the Bible tells us that God Himself witnessed your marriage vows? It says so in Malachi Chapter 2.

*"But I was married before I became a Christian, it doesn't count!"*

I'm willing to bet that this applies even to marriage vows spoken in parks and in courthouses between unbelievers. God was God before you accepted Him after all.

Unless we are saved when we are very young, we do come to God with a lot of baggage. We have some repenting to do and some old habits to shed, we even have some relationships that will probably need to be dropped, but our spouses are not on that list. Whether you realized it or not, when you got married, you did not just enter into a vow with your spouse. You entered into a vow with Almighty God. \*

You may not have married God's first choice for you. You were living life outside of His will altogether so that can't be any surprise to you now. But first choice or not—you are married. And God just isn't in the Divorce business.

### **He is in the Redemption business!**

What you bring to the Father now belongs to the Father. And that includes your marriage. Just as He has redeemed you from sin, He will redeem your marriage from the failure that it is heading for.

**Just trust Him.**

*\*Remember, this is for the Christian Couple who is considering divorce. It is not meant to brow beat a divorcee. If you are already divorced, skip this booklet and go directly to the Mercy and Grace of your Heavenly Father.*

## **Let's meet three couples:**

### **Couple One: Fred & Tina**

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Fred & Tina were married right out of high school. There were so in love. They had the biggest plans. Fred was going to be a rock musician. Tina was going to model hands for lotion ads. Sound silly? Hey, remember when you were eighteen?

Within a couple years it was clear that hand modeling wasn't as wide a field as Tina had hoped and she ended up working as a telephone solicitor. Fred's band broke up as all of the other guys got married and had kids. He went to work in a food processing plant.

Two kids later Fred and Tina were facing financial difficulty. No need for details, most of us know how it goes. Tina no longer feels secure and wonders if Fred still loves her. Fred wonders if Tina resents him for not making very good money. Fred is staying out a lot and is drinking too much. Tina is spending more and more time with her single girl friends. Both secretly wonder if there is someone else out there that they would be more happy with.

A friend of Tina's invited her to come to a ladies bible study and she accepts. She enjoys the friendships she makes there and starts to attend church on Sunday morning with the kids. Tina walks the aisle up the alter one morning when her heart feels like it will come out of her chest if she doesn't. She accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and begins a new life. She joins the church and gets her children involved. She invites Fred again and again until he shouts at her to leave him alone. It breaks her heart that he doesn't see how much it all means to her.

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## **Couple Two: Larry & Lynette's Marriage**

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Larry & Lynette were getting close to their ten year anniversary. Larry had been raised in a church but hadn't attended since he graduated from high school and left for college. Lynette had accepted Christ while at camp when she was sixteen years old and while she prayed and even read her bible now and then, she hadn't given church attendance much thought.

Larry & Lynette had been seeing a marriage counselor. It wasn't that they couldn't stand each other, it was more that they were bored with each other. Lynette spent more time dreaming about her romance novel heroes than she did thinking about her real life husband most days. And Larry had recently started picking up adult magazines again—something he had promised he was done with years ago. They had even brought up the possibility of separation but promised the marriage counselor to give it six months before they made any decisions.

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## **Couple Three: Abe & Sheree's Marriage**

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Abe and Sheree met in church. Abe had grown up in the church and Sheree had begun to attend with her newly saved parents when she came home from college. She wasn't sure what she thought about God but she sure liked Abe so she continued to come. Before Abe popped the big question, he had another to ask. "Sheree, do you love Jesus?"

Sheree had been in church long enough by this time to know the language and she definitely loved Abe so she said yes to make him happy. Attending church on Sunday was no big hassle and she enjoyed the friendships that they had made with other couples well enough.

One year and one white wedding later, Abe and Sheree were man and wife. Abe had a good job and Sheree worked part time until she gave birth to their first child. Everything was wonderful and no one could have expected what would come next. Abe and Sheree woke up to find their three week old daughter was not breathing.

Sheree had never heard of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome before this and she didn't know what to do with the terrible pain in her heart as they buried their precious baby girl. She found it hard to

get out of bed every day. Abe was grieving as well, but he was seeking solace from family and friends at church. Sheree just didn't want to hear it anymore. How was it supposed to make her feel better to think that her baby girl was in Heaven? She wanted to have her in her arms again. She started to avoid church gatherings.

As time went by Abe went back to work and it was obvious that he was healing. He tried to pull Sheree with him to events at church but she was increasingly sharp with him about it. Abe observed her growing bitterness with sadness and prayed for her often. He just couldn't understand why Sheree could not find comfort in knowing that they would see their little girl again someday.

Sheree pulled back emotionally from Abe, resenting his devotion to God for the first time. She began to make negative comments about his faith and finally in a moment of heated emotions she came right out and said that she didn't believe in God. She never had. Abe was shattered. Sheree packed a bag and went to her parents. The next day she told him she wanted a divorce.

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## **Hopeless Situations?**

Tina sounds like five or so young mothers attending my church right now. Reverse the genders and there's a couple young father's in the same shoes. They have finally answered the knock on the door of their heart and allowed God to come in. But the one that they love isn't interested.

And what do you do in Abe's situation? He thought he was marrying a believer. He had no idea that Sheree was "playing church" and did not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

God told His children not to be yoked with an unbeliever because it always causes incredible pain eventually. But, what do you do when you are already married and one becomes a believer and the other is not? Some do know and marry an unbeliever anyways. In either situation, once you're married one thing is true—it's too late for "I told you so".

Larry & Lynnette seem to be on the verge of giving up on their marriage. If you asked them, they would say that they are Christians. But, they no longer focus on one another and choose fantasy instead. The marriage counselor doesn't have much to offer by way of advise either.

**Here's some encouraging news for you:**

**If you woke up married this morning—God is not done working on your marriage.**

Never ever make the mistake of assuming that what is —*is what will be.*

We are going to return to these couples later and see how their lives turned out.

Stay tuned.

Okay, here it is.

A believer that wants a divorce is not listening to the voice of God. God is in the putting together business, not the tearing down business. Who does that leave? Whose voice is the believer listening to when he or she starts to seriously consider divorce?

### **Satan's.**

Is that a surprise? I hope not. We cannot be ignorant of his schemes.

How does Satan get us to start listening to him? It's easy enough. He just has to point out everything that you're missing out on by staying in this unhappy marriage. He points out every good looking member of the opposite sex and tells you that they would be a better spouse. He points out every happy marriage that exists around you and tells you that you deserve a marriage like that and the only way you are ever going to get it is by getting out of the terrible one that you are in and starting over.

He tells you that your needs are not being met. He lists them one by one. He points out every fault in your spouse. He reminds you of every single failure. He hits the rewind button and replays for you every negative comment that your spouse ever made about you. Every word spoken in anger, every angry look, every thoughtless act.

*Satan wins access to our mind one little thought at a time. All he has to do is keep you thinking about you.*

### **How do we know that Satan is behind these thoughts?**

Because the Bible says that we are always to consider others before ourselves. When we start playing the "what about me" game in our minds—that is our very first clue that the enemy is at work.

So, precious brothers and sisters—I say this with love and compassion: **Repent.**

Thinking that your own needs and desires outweigh God's will is a "proud argument that keeps people from knowing God". (2 Corinthians 10:5 NLT) The same verse tells us to "break down" that thought and "conquer" it.

How do you break it down? Repent of it.

Repent of putting yourself first. Repent of considering your own needs to be more important than obeying God and staying faithful to your wedding vows. I realize that for most of you it has never gone past the thoughts stage. But don't take those thoughts too lightly. Do as the Bible says and conquer it. Drop kick it across the yard and over the fence.

Now put your mouth where your thoughts should be.

**"I am 100% totally committed to my marriage."**

Yeah, say it out loud.

Say it again.

Write it on an index card and put it in your pocket or purse. Write it on another one and put it in your sock drawer. Put another one in your pencil drawer at the office. Write it on the inside of your bible. And every time you see one of those cards—say it again.

Now—say it to your spouse.

Whether he or she has had any idea that you have had any doubts—say it to them anyways.

**“I am 100% completely and irrevocably committed to our marriage.”**

Even if they are thinking about divorce themselves. Say it to them. Speak it. Let them know that you are committed to them no matter what.

**“But, what about our problems?”**

I’ll just say it again. **There is hope for your marriage!**

**Problems** don’t wreck marriages. **Divorce** wrecks marriages. With that out of the picture, problems we can handle.

Ask any happily married couple that you know. They have problems. Everyone can on short notice come up with a list of their spouses worst faults. The only difference is that a good spouse would never share that list with anyone but God.

1 Peter 4:8 says it beautifully: “Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.”

Sure there are going to be times when you need to talk with someone about your problems. But you need to make sure that it is someone who you and your spouse can trust. Do not share your spouses quirks with people who are going end up making judgments about them. Remember, one side of the story is just that. It isn’t fair to your spouse for you to be telling others about their issues.

The best thing that you can do is go to a Pastor or Elder or someone else in your church who is well known for being trustworthy and helpful to couples. If you don’t know anyone, just make an appointment to talk to your Pastor together as a couple.

This is even more important when your spouse is an unbeliever.

Don’t talk to seven different people about your problems at home and then go home and tell your spouse what those people had to say about it. That will definitely not help your spouse want to come to church with you next Sunday.

Guard your spouse, faults and all. There is of course one person who you can talk to freely about everything.

**God.**

Alright. We have recognized that our thoughts about divorce are from the enemy and we have repented of them. We have decided that our vows can be taken at face value and we will be “for better or for worse” staying with our spouse.

## **Now, Where Do We Go From Here?**

That will depend a lot on your situation. Let’s come back to our couples and see what happened in their lives.

## **Let’s Look at Our Three Couples Again**

### **Larry & Lynette**

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Invited by neighbors, their seven year old daughter went to church one Sunday. Their daughter came home from church full of excitement and with a packet of information from the church. As Lynette browsed through the info, Larry listened as their daughter told him about her lessons in Sunday School. It struck both of them at nearly the same time—they needed to go to church.

The next Sunday they dressed and visited the church that their daughter had been to. And they returned the next Sunday—and the next. Six months later they were still getting up and going every Sunday. They never made it back to the marriage counselor’s office for that follow up appointment. Instead they started meeting with the Pastor at the church to work on bettering their communication. They joined a small group with several other couples. Larry went to a men’s conference in the Spring and Lynette started to attend a women’s bible study.

Larry threw out his magazines and Lynette bagged up her romance novels. They started to take walks together after church. Their daughter finally put their thoughts into words for them one morning at breakfast. “I think that you guys are in love aren’t you?” Larry took Lynette’s hand and smiled at their daughter. “We sure are honey. We sure are.”

It’s not that Larry & Lynette’s problems melted away. They have just learned to stop focusing on themselves and their problems. They re-centered their lives around God and found encouragement and fellowship in a local church. As they are learning and growing, they are discovering each other again. They are not “living happily ever after”, But they are living together ever after one way or another. And that God can work with.

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### **Too simple?**

Just start going to church and—voila! Instant Happiness?

No. That is not the moral to the story. Remember, Larry & Lynette both had a (dormant) relationship with Jesus Christ to start with. Attending church and getting sound biblical teachings rekindled their spiritual life. Church going alone isn't going to save a marriage. But it's a good place to start.

What about you?

### **Are you plugged into a good local church?**

*What is a good local church anyways?*

For you, a good local church has an active membership with people your age in attendance. You hear good bible based life application messages on Sunday morning and you can grow in your understanding by joining small group bible studies. There are a lot of opportunities to fellowship with other couples socially and there are ministries for your kids.

And remember—you are not going to repair and rejuvenate your marriage on Sunday mornings alone. Get involved!

Then what?

Every good church offers opportunities for improving marriages. Whether it is small group studies or large group retreats. Take advantage of them! Go! Go! Go! You will be amazed at what you can learn at these events.

There are dozens of relationship building tools that will improve your marriage. Personality Identification—what makes you behave the way that you do? Spiritual Gifting Surveys—what makes you want to do the things you want to do? Love Languages—what makes you feel loved? Mediation—how can you learn to communicate better and solve problems? Parenting—how can you co-parent rather than argue about the kids all the time? Inner Healing—how can you get past the past and learn to love again?

Intimidating? You betcha! Worth it? You betcha!

Take it one step at a time and trust God. He will guide you to just what you need just when you need it.

### **Fred & Tina**

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Tina and the kids continued to attend church and stopped pestering Fred about it. Tina's bible study leader took a personal interest in Tina and took time to learn about her home life. She encouraged her and offered to partner with her in prayer for Fred. She recommended books about prayer and marriage.

Tina learned about being a help mate to her husband and began to put her new understanding into action at home. She went out of her way to make affirming comments to Fred about his work and about him personally. She set a goal to tell her husband at least

once every week that she was glad that he was her husband and she wouldn't trade him for the world. She found a new way to express it each and every week.

Fred didn't know when it started and he wouldn't be able to say if you asked him exactly what was different, but he knew something had changed in his life. He was feeling more confident and he wasn't thinking all the time about whether he made enough money. Soon he was choosing to stay home more often and spend fewer nights out drinking with his friends. Then it hit him, he was really enjoying the time he got to spend with his wife. Somehow Tina was different.

It was Easter Sunday and their kids were in the musical program at church. Tina prayed for courage and approached Fred one more time about coming to church. To her surprise and delight, he accepted. Fred attended the program and the following Sunday he came out to the kitchen table dressed for church. He smiled tentatively and asked if they would mind if he came along. Tina couldn't help it. She cried as she nodded yes.

That afternoon Fred sat down next to Tina in the living room and asked her about the changes he could see in her. She shared with him in simple word. She had accepted Jesus as Lord of her life and He was working the changes in her in ways that she didn't even understand. She just knew that she was happier and it was helping her to be a better wife. Fred's heart swelled and he held his wife's hand as if it were a life preserver. "Tina, can Jesus help me to be a better husband?" Tina wept freely and embraced her husband. "Yes, He can."

Fred accepted Jesus right then and there. Tina never had to ask him to go to church with her again.

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### **Too simple again?**

You are a tough audience you know that? What do you want? A hard luck story?

One thing I left out of Fred & Tina's story. Something you don't know.

How many years passed between Tina's salvation and Fred's?

Six. Six long years. Six Easter programs. Six Christmas celebrations. Tina's prayers were going up to a faithful Heavenly Father through all of them. And Fred's heart was slowly but surely softening through each and every day.

With every patient affirming glance from his wife. With every positive word spoken. With every hug and every smile. His self-worth grew and his heart was tenderized. All for the day when he would finally answer the knock on his heart's door.

As far as Tina is concerned, it could have been 16 or 60 years and it would have still been worth it.

Too often we're looking for instant potatoes.

We read a good book on prayer and we put it into action and wait for the "poof" to take place. Sometimes it happens. Miracles happen every day. God has a plan for every life and you can't know what His plan is for another person. There is no way of knowing just how hard hearted one person can be.

We're not called to pray for a "poof". We're called to pray. Period.

Same goes for the changes that God calls us to.

His word is teaching us to be more patient, more good, more loving... When we are implementing a big change in our life, we may expect a big reaction right away. But it might not come as soon as you like or in the form you expect.

### **Don't give up.**

I wonder how many times Fred ignored Tina's words of kindness before he noticed them? I imagine that she felt unappreciated on more than one occasion. I asked her. She just smiled and said it again:

### **It was worth it.**

Galatians 6:9 agrees with her: "So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest at the appropriate time."

## **Abe & Sheree**

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The hardest thing Abe ever had to do was let his wife walk out of his life. She filed for divorce on her own and refused to see Abe. The next time Abe saw Sheree she was in the hospital recovering from a suicide attempt.

Abe cried out to God. He had never felt so helpless in all his life. If he could have willed Sheree to know God he would have but he knew that there was nothing that he could do but love her. When Sheree came out of the hospital she agreed to begin meeting with a Christian counselor from the church. She did not return to their home but stayed with her parents.

Three months later Sheree moved back into their home. Her emotional state was still tender and she diagnosed as being clinically depressed and put on medication. But she continued to see her Christian counselor and she attended church with Abe on

Sundays. Abe prayed for her faithfully and loved her as well as he knew how.

Abe came home from work on a Friday to find Sheree in a tearful state. "I'm pregnant Abe. We're going to have another baby." She crumbled into his arms and wept for what seemed to Abe like hours. Abe held her and his tears mixed with hers. As he prayed for Sheree he felt encouraged by the Holy Spirit that Sheree's emotional outpouring was a good thing for her. She was opening her heart to God at last.

When Sheree was drained of all her tears, when her emotions settled, she rested in her husband's arms, feeling some peace at last. She didn't know how to put it into words, but she just felt lighter. And she felt hopeful.

Sheree accepted the invitation when it was given at church several weeks later and made Jesus Christ Lord of her life at last. Abe and Sheree eventually had four children, all girls. Sheree later founded a ministry for grieving parents.

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Abe could have given up on Sheree. How many young men do you know that can stand by through a suicide attempt? Do you know how many angry and spiteful words he had to hear from Sheree before he received some acceptance of his love from her? Sheree was hurting and hurting people hurt people.

I stand amazed at God's redemptive power. There is no life so low that He cannot lift it up.

Sheree knew so much pain and grief that it drove her to try to end her life. But with God's healing power in her life, she discovered that she could use the memory of that pain to minister healing to many others who were going through similar tragedy.

### **You see?**

There was hope for Larry & Lynette.

There was hope for Fred & Tina.

There was hope for Abe & Sheree.

There is hope for your marriage!

I could tell you ten more stories. Stories about couples who survived adultery, bankruptcy, house fire, crippling accidents...each one would further illustrate God's healing and redemption of marriages.

Maybe I will sometime.

**Maybe, someday I will be telling yours.**