

Rough Patches

Various

Central Idea: The Bible speaks to every issue that arises in your marriage, but each of us must be humble enough to hear God's counsel!

Introduction

As we conclude our marriage series, I wanted to focus finally on problems that generally arise within a marriage, and what the Bible has to say about them. I have realized, from the beginning, that I come to the conversation about marriage as a single man, but I believe that the whole counsel of the Bible should be preached, and so I have endeavored to do my best in researching and work-shopping these messages on marriage.

Because I am not married, but have only observed marriages, good and bad, I scoured my resources to discover what some of the reasons people give up on their marriages are. I found a lot of top ten lists, and have compiled a list based off of the regularly repeating items on several others. I then took this list to several married couples and asked if these are real-life reasons they would think about leaving their spouse for if they came up. So I tried to do my homework for this morning's message and I have two goals in preaching today. The first is that you would see how Scripture deals with the nitty-gritty day-to-day issues of your marriage and life, how its counsel was not just excellent 2,000 years ago, but is more than enough today. My second goal is to encourage you to work on your marriage if any of these issues are present or they could get a foot in the door of your marriage.

I have one final disclaimer before we begin. This message does not replace biblical and godly marriage counseling. It is not intended as a cure-all or a way to avoid getting the help that you may need. It is my prayer that if your marriage needs help, you would find someone gifted in the Word of God and power of His Spirit to help you work through issues in your marriage. Sometimes, that might be me as your pastor, but other times it might be another trained professional.

- I. Don't give into temporal challenges in marriage.
 - A. Unfulfilled Expectations/Incompatibility
 - i. Some of the lesser reasons that couples give for divorce seem to bring a hasty decision. We live in such an immediate and engrossed culture, such an environment that teaches selfishness, that we forget about others, even a spouse.

- ii. Everyone comes to a marriage with expectations. How many children are you going to have? What's every day going to be like? What kinds of things are you going to do together?
- iii. This is a good thing to have expectations, but it's not a good thing to divorce because they haven't been met. Often in the beginning of a marriage, there is a honeymoon period where your spouse can do no wrong.
- iv. You find their unique quirks romantic or special, but not as life continues. Because we romanticize marriage so much, people come to marriage with high expectations without thinking of the day-to-day work and commitment that must be there for those romantic moments.
- v. Another issue might happen in a marriage where the couple finds that they are incompatible, in most cases, referring to sexual drive and compatibility.
- vi. Some people are more dynamic than others in the changes that occur in their lives as they are married. Some spouses never really change, and this is especially noticeable with bad habits.
- vii. Other spouses don't seem to have a foundation or center and are always changing. Some people don't ever really learn what kind of person they are before they get married, and they married someone based on changing criteria rather than who they really are.
- viii. **Illustration:** The movie Runaway Bride demonstrates this principle. The woman in the movie has a habit of leaving men at the altar and running out on them the day of the ceremony. She finally meets her match, and they go to get married but she runs like she did every other time. The man tells her the reason for this is that she becomes a chameleon, mimicking the men she dates, because she doesn't know who she is. She takes time to learn who she is and they get married. Hope I didn't ruin it for you if you've never seen it.
- ix. So what does the Bible say about these two problems in marriage? The Bible counsels married couples to stay together despite the small differences. Every human being on this planet is unique. You are not going to find a carbon-copy of yourself, and if you did, you'd grow tired of your own quirks in someone else.
- x. Proverbs 5:15-20 is wisdom from a father to a son, but can be applied to all who are married. Solomon teaches his son to always find his "home" or his happy place in the wife of his youth. He counsels this son to not seek other women, but to discover the one he already has.

- xi. Who's to say you should stop dreaming and creating other expectations with one another? Part of maturing is to grow toward your spouse, not away from them.
- xii. As far as incompatibility, that goes against the Bible's teaching on the first married couple. When Adam saw Eve, he was delighted in her. His standard of beauty and attraction was the only other woman in the world. Your spouse should be your standard of beauty. You should be "into" whatever they are like. Have you ever seriously taken a moment to communicate anything you wanted them to change, or are you just throwing in the towel?
- xiii. **Application:** There are bound to be times of dissatisfaction in marriage with your spouse's habits or looks or something else. Our pluralistic culture has taught us to shop around. But that's not a Christian ethic! Call a truce in which each of you can offer one possible and godly change you want in your spouse, and let them offer you one to change. Work together to become more the person your spouse wants to be married to.

B. Boredom/Lack of Interest/Unhappiness/Weight Gain

- i. Another couple of reasons for divorce that I have found in my research seem to me to be shallow, even petty. But remember I'm not married. I can imagine that those expecting an exciting thrill every day in their marriage might get bored in the mundane day-to-day life.
- ii. That's right. People actually get divorced because they are bored with their spouses! They don't share any interests together or are just flat out unhappy.
- iii. Some have even been so shallow as to divorce because their spouse gained weight! Really? Is this really our culture and environment? No commitment. No care for another. What was the point of getting married if these differences are going to drive you apart?
- iv. In Jesus' day, a man could divorce his wife for the stupidest things as well. In one Rabbi's teachings, if she doesn't cook well or clean the house or look smoking hot every day, the husband had reason to get a divorce.
- v. Today, husbands are trading in their wives for a younger model and wives are playing this cougar game where they look for kids half their age to get romantically involved with.
- vi. Once again, I must point out the shows we watch on TV, the movies we see, some of the novels that are out there. We live in a sex-crazed culture. We're heavy on the romance and looking for feelings of love, but light on commitment and the challenge of growing close over time. Intimacy is not our strong suit.

- vii. It has only been recently in human history that humans have married for the emotion of love rather than the commitment to continually love. When you read about love in the Bible, it is not about some feeling of butterflies in your stomach.
- viii. The love in the Bible is an unconditional decision to live life together, to commit to one another no matter what circumstances may come. It is a deep foundational choice to serve and care for one another, not a selfish, “If I feel like it” kind of love. Emotions change, but love is a choice that you commit to for life.
- ix. Aside from all of this, think about these excuses to get a divorce. People can lose weight, especially if they are committed to that goal. You can discover a new hobby together or find something of mutual interest. Or here’s a new idea: why not put your spouse first and join them in what they enjoy and they can join you in what you enjoy.
- x. What would you do if God no longer felt love for you? Would you like Him to walk out on His commitment to save you from Hell? What if the creator and sustainer of the universe got bored with you? I challenge you to at least make an effort to find a common ground with your spouse and spice things up to keep it interesting.
- xi. **Application:** Don’t think that since you’re married you can quit trying to be all that your spouse married. Keep up the work it took to win your spouse. Maintenance is the harder discipline than winning them. Until you’ve given effort and discipline to winning them every day of your marriage, you really shouldn’t consider divorce.

II. Don’t let differences destroy your relationship.

A. Financial Hardship

- i. Shallow reasons aside, let’s move to more serious problems in the marriage. Another reason cited for divorce in a marriage was financial hardship.
- ii. Now this is left up to interpretation, anything from one spouse who wants to take a risk with some money and the other is not a risk-taker, or perhaps the amount of debt accrued is impossible to overcome.
- iii. There are other financial issues, such as both husband and wife working or not working, as well as the fact that everyone has a set or go-to style for dealing with finances. Some are spenders, some are savers, and some have other ways of approaching money.
- iv. No matter what the financial situation, the Bible is littered with sound and godly advice for your finances. The first step to taking finances out of the reasons for divorce is to figure out what your own ideas toward money are, and then discussing your differences as a couple.

- v. The Bible heartily advocates the totality of the “two becoming one flesh” in Genesis, even to a financial point. A biblical norm is for the marriage to be truly united in one bank account.
- vi. Many do not live that way in their marriage, but I would ask you to think about this. What does having separate accounts do for your marriage? These are places that one can hide secrets from another in a marriage that is supposed to be intimate and open.
- vii. Separate bank accounts also gives a person fuel to prepare to leave if they are not happy in marriage. It gives them a way to maintain their desire to leave. It shows them that they don’t have to rely on their spouse or build their relationship. They always have a plan B.
- viii. I would suggest to you studying what the Bible has to say about finances. Perhaps one person in the couple manages finances better than the other and that is a part of the marriage they would be willing to take care of.
- ix. There are also wonderful resources for Christians on finances, such as Larry Burkett’s books as well as the CROWN Financial Ministries curriculum, which teaches people what the Bible says about finances.
- x. **Application:** While finances can be a struggle, especially with our economy the way it is and what we are taught by our environment, it is not a deal-breaker for marriage. A marriage can actually grow strong as it weathers the storms of the financial situations in life. The struggle will teach you for the next storm, and that strength will also help you rely on one another. We give up too easily in our culture. Let’s not give up without a fight for our marriages!

B. Child Rearing Differences

- i. Another more serious point to be made is in the differences that couples have as they begin to have children. Some might have been raised in a more authoritarian home and others in a more relaxed home.
- ii. Bringing two people together with two different home life backgrounds makes them need to talk through their approach in their marriage. Perhaps there are things your parents did in discipline that you don’t want to do, or maybe you want to emulate your parents.
- iii. The most common scenario I have noticed as I have observed couples is that one may be more of the disciplinarian while the other might not be very good at discipline.
- iv. Children are quite shrewd. I learned early on who was the disciplinarian and who took it easy on me. I knew who to ask if I needed money or knew that I was going to be in trouble. Your kids will see these loop holes in your marriage as well.

- v. The best advice for differences in raising children is to decide on a course of action for discipline, and then stick to it. It is important to back one another up in their discipline of the children and present a united front. Don't leave your spouse out to dry when it's time for discipline. Kids can be relentless.
- vi. The Bible does offer advice on child rearing and discipline as well as parent-child relationships, such as Proverbs 22:6 and Ephesians 6:1-4 and like passages.
- vii. Another difficulty having to do with children in marriage is whether or not both people can have children. Throughout Bible history and even today, there are certain genetic problems that limit a couple in their desire to have children.
- viii. In the Bible, there were many women who struggled through barrenness, a particularly dangerous peril in Bible times when not having children meant no one would take care of you in your old age.
- ix. Women like Sarah, Hannah, Elizabeth, Rachel, Leah and a score of other women did not give up on their marriages because they couldn't bear children. Instead, they took it to God in prayer, and He opened their wombs.
- x. Aside from prayer when you find that you're having trouble with having a child, there are a host of medical services that serve couples in biblical ways to help them with bearing children, as well as the option of adoption. So many children grow up parent-less in our societies, and we need good mothers and fathers for children that are already here in the world.
- xi. **Application:** No matter what path God gives you in the area of children in your marriage, keep open lines of communication. Children are a blessing from the Lord, and your lives will be challenged and cultivated by children. Don't let problems with parenting or having children keep you from experiencing the full range of life with them!

C. Cultural, Ethnic, Age and Religious Differences

- i. As we tighten up the more serious reasons people get a divorce, I was informed that many divorce for cultural or ethnic differences, as well as differences in age or religious backgrounds.
- ii. When it comes to culture and ethnicity, the Bible has some pretty interesting points to make in general. And these understandings and principles should be included in marriage.
- iii. For instance, concerning ethnicity, the gospel is open to every nation and tribe and people group. Paul says that there are no more barriers between human beings who serve Christ, that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free, for all are one in Christ (Gal 3:28).

- iv. When it comes to culture, the Bible was written in human history and time, and therefore certain cultures are included in the writing of the Bible. But there is also a culture of the Kingdom of God that stands against the cultures around us.
- v. Each culture has good and biblical elements to it, and each culture has unbiblical and ungodly influences within it. When you are married to someone with a different culture, the hard work becomes finding out what in their culture is not honoring to God and what is.
- vi. “It’s just the way my culture is” should not be an excuse to continue doing things that a spouse does not like. Don’t forget that the way we treat others is included in our culture.
- vii. Everyone has culture. You might have grown up in a culture where you didn’t show affection in public or hug one another. If your spouse comes from the opposite kind of culture, that will be quite an adjustment.
- viii. But you must weigh whether or not Jesus has a culture like yours, your spouse’s or somewhere in the middle. And that should become the norm for your marriage. Culture is everywhere and sometimes we don’t even realize our cultural preferences. But getting married changes that, and we must weigh what should stay and what should go.
- ix. The other two issues mentioned here are quite weighty indeed. Differences in age and religion can be the final nail in the coffin of your struggling marriage.
- x. Age differences were generally understood to be more than 10 years apart. When people get married, they don’t often think about a large gap in ages, but it must be considered simply because age adds wisdom and maturity.
- xi. There is danger in a lack of maturity in one spouse. The storms of life and the events that will happen to a married couple are going to require a certain level of maturity. It’s great to maintain a playful and youthful zeal for life, but it’s not so great to be married to someone who can’t be responsible or understanding.
- xii. It is notable that throughout the Bible, there are often larger age differences between married couples. Women tended to be much younger than men, which contributed to their need to have children to take care of them when their husbands died.
- xiii. A deeper issue even than these is that of religious differences. Let’s start with having a different religion altogether. The Bible does speak directly to this issue in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.
- xiv. **Illustration:** The Bible calls us to not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. A yoke was a big wooden frame put over the oxen that

ploughed together. The yoke made the oxen move in the same direction. But if one was faster than the other, both would tire out faster.

- xv. So also, when you are not under the same yoke or the same religious beliefs as your spouse, there will always be the strain of which direction to go, which set of principles to follow, and the like.
- xvi. Marrying spouses of other faiths in the Old Testament brought Israel to ruin eventually, and it could be a grave, deep, foundational danger in your marriage if you find yourself in that situation.
- xvii. The best advice on this matter is to deeply consider this principle of 2 Corinthians before you get married. But if you are in that situation now, there is another passage that may apply to you in 1 Corinthians 7.
- xviii. The Bible also deals with an unbelieving spouse in 1 Corinthians 7. It is most likely Paul was taking on the issue of what would happen if one person in the marriage became a Christian but the other did not. They were most likely previously married before one became a Christian.
- xix. So now there is the tension of a spouse who does not believe in Christian principles and in Jesus, and one who does. This produces that same strain on the marriage as the unequally yoked situation.
- xx. In 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, Paul speaks on this very issue of tension in the home of one Christian spouse and one unbelieving spouse. While some parts of his argument are harder to interpret, the clear teaching is that if an unbelieving spouse wants out of the marriage, the Christian spouse should allow them to go in peace.
- xxi. What this passage does not allow for is the Christian kicking out the unbelieving spouse. It must be the unbeliever who seeks divorce from the Christian. We are not called to divide but to unite. And who knows if your lifestyle will not change the unbeliever's mind and heart?
- xxii. **Application:** It's a challenge to live with these differences. They are more foundational in our lives. Unlike the sillier reasons for leaving, these are things that are less likely to change or be able to be changed. They will continue to present themselves as problems in your marriage. For that reason, it is important to choose a spouse wisely in the beginning, but also to seek counseling and to be obedient to the Lord and His Word in your marriage.

III. Don't let serious issues come between you.

A. Lack of Positive Communication

- i. Now we reach the top reasons why people get divorced. The first is lack of communication. A marriage is a union between two living, breathing, busy and industrious souls. It is the two becoming one flesh.

- ii. Many marriages at some point suffer from a lack of communication. Some suffer from negative communication where spouses abuse one another with words or misconstrue the words that are spoken.
- iii. One of the hardest things to master is the tongue, as James pointed out in his letter. But it's not just what we say that affects meaning. It's how we say it, our tone, body language, and other cues.
- iv. Lack of communication is a top problem because it's through this lack that other problems are made larger. If a couple refuses to clear the air or talk about something that might be bothering them, that elephant gets bigger and bigger.
- v. Because not talking about issues can make them fester and grow larger, good and regular communication in a marriage is key to the marriage's survival.
- vi. It's not wrong to express your feelings or your perspective to your spouse, but there is a way to do it in a loving and encouraging way. Many couples can speak the truth, but they mix it with venom. Or it's even worse when they cover up the truth just to get by.
- vii. **Application:** A marriage that has good communication has a lot going for it. The problems that arise are not swept under the rug or ignored. They are not belittled or made mountainous. They are dealt with in love and truth. Communication of all sorts is a necessity to maintaining your marriage for the long haul.

B. Addiction

- i. One of the surprises in this list, affirmed by married couples I talked to this week, is addictions. While most of the lists are talking about substance abuse, such as alcohol, drugs and the like, addictions come in all forms and sizes.
- ii. One could say that everyone is addicted to something. The question is whether it is a dangerous addiction or a casual one. We've talked about addictions during our holiness series at the end of last year.
- iii. The Bible is clear that we should not allow anything to master us. But in a marriage, an addiction can wreak havoc on a relationship because it puts your loved one behind your obsession.
- iv. No longer are you concerned for your family's welfare. For instance, in alcoholism, the money and time spent at a bar or drinking away from a family can destroy the development of children, not to mention if you're an angry drunk who abuses your family at any point under the influence.
- v. Addictions can include things that you wouldn't normally consider. I taught that an addiction is anything that we hold higher than our

relationship with God during the holiness series. That is a good general rule to follow.

- vi. If you can't stop what you are doing, whether for a short time or for good, it might be an addiction, and it might be quietly choking and starving your marriage.
- vii. If you need help to get away from addictions, accountability is a good tool in the church to use. Perhaps your addiction is so bad that you need professional help. Don't let that get in the way of your marriage or family.

C. Abuse

- i. Within the top three on most of these resources was abuse. Everyone was quite clear that abuse can be physical, and that is the most observable type of abuse, but it is certainly not the only type.
- ii. Ranging from physical to verbal to emotional to mental abuse, there are so many ways a spouse can damage their partner. Abusive language that cuts your spouse down rather than building them up is a problem.
- iii. Abusive emotions such as anger or hatred, as well as taking advantage of another's emotional state, are all forms of abuse. You don't want to make your spouse a victim.
- iv. Marriage is supposed to be a place of love and grace. It is supposed to be a place where each person is honored and cared for and built up. While many would never beat their spouse physically, they have no problem throwing verbal punches or taking advantage of emotions.
- v. Devaluing your spouse with your words might be one of the cruelest forms of abuse. It happens often in many marriages. Sometimes it is brought on by a situation and is not meant in the heart. But when it is said, it cannot be taken back.
- vi. I'm not saying you should worship your spouse with your words. No one is perfect. But you must find constructive and encouraging ways to bring up weaknesses rather than through abusive approaches.
- vii. **Application:** If you wouldn't physically abuse your spouse, don't fall into the trap of other forms of abuse either. Any kind of abuse will hurt and make wounds that will add up over time. Take good care and kind care of your spouse, and it will pay many dividends. We are called as Christians to be kind to one another, and that command doesn't change just because you live with the other person.

D. Infidelity (Divorce/Separation)

- i. The number one reason for getting a divorce on all the lists I found was adultery or infidelity. This is no surprise, and the Bible has been dealing with this problem since the beginning.

- ii. Moses made laws that supported divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. He allowed for a certificate of divorce for the reason of indecency. The most common way this would be applied is if the woman was not a virgin when he married her.
- iii. In the New Testament, Jesus adds to the understanding of the Law. In Matthew 5:31-32, He tells us that there is only one reason for divorce, which is sexual immorality.
- iv. Later in Matthew 19:8-9, Jesus explained that it was because the hardness of human hearts that Moses allowed for divorce in any case, but repeats that it is only viable because of sexual immorality.
- v. We've talked about divorce before, and the Bible tells us that God hates divorce (Mal 2:16). Jesus limited it to just adultery and Moses had the same limitations.
- vi. People divorce because their heart is hard. They cannot forgive what their spouse has done. I'm not judging anyone who has gone through divorce at all. I'm simply telling you what I see in the Bible.
- vii. Even separation is limited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. Separation should always be for a certain time. Some might use separation as a sort of "soft divorce."
- viii. Separation should always have a time frame for thinking about the situation and trying to communicate. Sometimes it is necessary, such as when there is abuse in the home for either a spouse or children.
- ix. But separation is not divorce. It is a time of recollection and evaluation. The problem is that we have become so casual about divorce. It should not even be on the table as an option except in this one instance of adultery.
- x. Now here's the rub. Just because the Bible allows for something like divorce in that one situation does not mean that you have to do it for that situation. If your spouse cheats on you with someone else, the Bible is not commanding that you have to divorce them. It is allowing for your hard heart toward that spouse.
- xi. An allowance is not a command. I believe that even the hardest of situations, the worst of cases, can be redeemed by God. I believe that forgiveness can overcome even adultery. I've seen it happen in a few marriages.
- xii. It's a powerful thing to be able to forgive such a deep hurt. Not many are able to love and forgive that much. I want to challenge you to find a way to forgive instead of allowing your heart to harden against your spouse. Healing cannot begin in you or your spouse through divorce.

- xiii. Divorce affects you first, your spouse next, and especially your children. It splits families and destroys lives. We have made it cheap and easy in our culture, and look what it has done to our generations!
- xiv. I plead with you as your pastor to always seek every other possibility before you begin to even think of divorce. I want you to know that no matter what is going on in your marriage, I am here for you. Don't hesitate to let me help you or find help for you.

Conclusion

After looking at the ten most common reasons for divorce, and seeing how God's Word deals with all of them, I am grateful that God did not leave us hanging in these most important issues in marriages. He provides His Word as our guide and His church as our resource. If your marriage is in danger of any kind, seek God's counsel in the Bible and in those you trust in His church. Don't feel like you are alone, because you are not. Jesus is here for you, and so is His Church. May the marriages in this assembly be blessed of the Lord in all ways!

Action Points

- Some of the surface issues in marriage show us how selfish we are. These are things that can be changed, but couples have to share the burden and its solution.
- There is a second level of issues that do have a foundation to them. They are a bit more permanent, harder to change, set ways. Some of these can still be changed, but it is more likely both partners will have to find unselfish solutions to such issues.
- Serious issues can arise in marriage, and communication is one of the keys to bringing them out of the closet. Don't let these things fester or grow larger. Don't feed them with silence or ignore them. Bring them into the light and let God heal the brokenness they cause!