



## Hope for a Difficult or Abusive Marriage

*Kurt Bruner, The Center for Strong Families  
Adapted by Greenville Oaks Church of Christ*

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 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.

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 eighty percent 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). However, God is in the business of helping couples redeem what many would see as a hopeless situation. Grace and forgiveness are hallmarks of the Christian faith.

“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.

Sometimes the boundaries imposed by a separation will cause the abuser to seek help in making necessary changes to their behavior. It also gives the spouse being abused a chance to heal and grow emotionally stronger and less codependent.

Because of the emotional dysfunction that thrives in an abusive marriage, seek support and accountability during the separation process. Stay connected to a safe group of friends and family who know the situation and have your family’s best interests at heart.

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

Whatever situation you’re in, resist the temptation to struggle through a difficult marriage alone. You



need the church body like never before—for perspective and advice, counseling and encouragement, and hope for God’s redemption.

A difficult marriage can strain every aspect of your life, including your relationship with God. People who are going through the private and agonizing challenges of a rough marriage often feel isolated and alone.

Depending on the circumstances, you may feel angry, betrayed, and/or ashamed. You may have a deep sadness, leading you to withdraw from social situations when you actually need those connections more than ever. Seek out safe people of the same gender who will honor your confidences, care for your heart, and lift you up to God in prayer.

## **GOING FURTHER - Resources**

### **Recommended Books:**

*Available for checkout at the Faith@Home Center or for purchase online.*

*Love and Respect* by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs

*Breaking the Cycle of Divorce* by Dr. John Trent

*Boundaries in Marriage* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

*Love Must be Tough* by Dr. James Dobson

### **Recommended Website:**

[TroubledWith.com](http://TroubledWith.com) Look for the various topics under “Relationships” that address dealing with a troubled marriage.

## **GOING FURTHER – Church Support**

### **Divorce Care**

This 13-week course provides information and resources that can help you through the sometimes long and painful process. Please contact the church office at 972-727-2359 or email [FaithatHome@greenvilleoaks.org](mailto:FaithatHome@greenvilleoaks.org) for information about the next seminar.

### **Dynamic Marriage**

Greenville Oaks offers the Dynamic Marriage course on a yearly basis. Learn how communication and behavior styles affect the way you and your spouse act and react to each other. To inquire about the next Dynamic Marriage course, please contact the church office at 972-727-2359 or email [FaithatHome@greenvilleoaks.org](mailto:FaithatHome@greenvilleoaks.org).

### **HOPE at Greenville Oaks**

HOPE meets at Greenville Oaks on Wednesday evenings from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. HOPE provides the support for those dealing with emotional pain and loss in relationships by combining mental health concepts with biblical truths in a safe and confidential environment. While the parents are in HOPE, kids are welcome to participate in *Celebration Place* where they will learn about some of the same principles as their parents in age-appropriate ways. For more information, please email [hope@greenvilleoaks.org](mailto:hope@greenvilleoaks.org) or call the church office at 972-727-2359.

### **Professional Christian Counseling**

Greenville Oaks Church of Christ offers various resources for Christ-centered professional counseling (including premarital counseling). For more information, please call the church office at 972-727-2359 or email [FaithatHome@greenvilleoaks.org](mailto:FaithatHome@greenvilleoaks.org).