

Redemptive Divorce

A Biblical Process That Offers Guidance for the Suffering Partner, Healing for the Offending Spouse, and the Best Catalyst for Restoration

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Take Your Time!

Before doing anything concrete, the upright spouse must prepare. This includes setting short-term and long-term goals, deciding what course of action would most please the Lord based on the particular challenges to the marriage, and gathering important documentation. This stage of the process will feel like a waste of time because nothing seems to be happening while the destructive behavior continues, but it is in fact the most important. Failing to complete this phase is like starting a long road trip without a map. You can ask for directions along the way and eventually get where you're going, but how much time, energy, and money will you have wasted?

I urge the upright spouse to be patient and to give considerable thought to these forms. He or she should answer the questions thoroughly, focus on facts more than feelings, and diligently gather all of the documents listed. This information will be required eventually, and the whole process will be much less taxing later if these details are addressed at the beginning. A competent Christian counselor would be an invaluable resource during this time. If the upright spouse doesn't already have the support of a counselor, he or she should enlist the help of one while completing the worksheets.

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Repentance Inventory

Sometimes people merely pretend to repent in order to avoid loss or to retain control. And they can appear authentically sorrowful, only to return to their destructive behavior later. An obvious change in attitude and behavior always accompanies repentance. Have you observed the six signs of genuine repentance in your partner?

- 1. Repentant people are willing to confess all their sins, not just the sins that got them into trouble.* Has your spouse demonstrated a desire to be completely honest about his or her behavior? Describe the response you would hope to see from your spouse.
- 2. Repentant people face the pain their sin has caused others.* Has your spouse allowed you to express the intensity of emotions you feel—anger, hurt, sorrow, and disappointment—without trying to justify, minimize, or shift blame? Describe how your spouse reacts to your emotions.
- 3. Repentant people ask forgiveness from those they hurt.* Has your spouse asked your forgiveness? Do you believe his or her sorrow is genuine? Does your spouse pressure you to say, “I forgive you”? Does he or she expect you to “get over it” without sufficient time to heal? Describe the attitude you hope to see in your spouse concerning his or her destructive behavior.
- 4. Repentant people remain accountable to a small group of mature Christians.* What has your spouse done to address any issues that may have contributed to his or her destructive choices? What is your partner doing to avoid a relapse and to grow stronger as a God-honoring person?
- 5. Repentant people accept their limitations.* Does your spouse resent your need for reassurance? Does he or she seem to understand the need for the rebuilding of trust over time? How does your partner respond to your request that he or she observe certain restrictions?
- 6. Repentant people are faithful to the daily tasks God has given them.* Is your spouse putting forth good effort to fulfill his or her duties at work and at home? Is your partner moving forward in life with humility, or do you sense that he or she merely wants to get things back to normal as quickly as possible?

Preparing to Respond

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

—Matthew 18:15–17

What behavior on the part of your spouse has compromised your marriage?

Describe the change in your spouse's behavior that would demonstrate genuine repentance. Be specific.

What must he or she *stop* doing? What should he or she *start* doing?

If your spouse were to repent and then affirm his or her desire to restore your marriage, what can he or she do to regain your trust?

What program or organization might encourage your mate to remain faithful to the restoration process and provide you with reasonable assurance of progress?

Preparing to Live Apart

While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.

—1 Peter 2:23

Shelter: Describe what living arrangement would best suit you and your children for the next several weeks. Be as specific as you can.

Where do you think you could live if your spouse refuses to move out?

Security: Describe the financial arrangements you would most favor during separation. This should include provision for living expenses, continued health care, protection of your credit rating, and so on.

What is the most likely means of financial support for you and your children during separation should the court *not* award temporary support?

Stability: Describe how the new living and financial arrangements would provide greater *practical* stability for the children and yourself than continued cohabitation.

How have your children and you suffered physically as a result of your spouse's destructive behavior?

Sanity: Describe how the new living and financial arrangements would provide greater *emotional* stability for the children and yourself than continued cohabitation.

What testimony or official records demonstrate how your children or you have been negatively impacted by your spouse's destructive behavior?

Monthly Household Expenses

| | |
|---|--|
| Fixed Monthly Expenses | |
| Mortgage or rent | |
| Homeowners' association dues | |
| Childcare | |
| Health insurance | |
| Auto insurance | |
| Other insurance | |
| Auto loan payments | |
| Credit card payments | |
| Other loan payments | |
| Variable Monthly Expenses | |
| Groceries | |
| Utilities | |
| Telephone | |
| Electric/Gas | |
| Cable/Internet | |
| Water/Sewer/Garbage | |
| Gasoline | |
| Clothing | |
| Medical/dental (out-of-pocket) | |
| Healthy activities for the children | |
| Miscellaneous (attach examples) | |
| Other Expenses (per year, divided by 12) | |
| Education (tuition, fees, books, etc.) | |
| Taxes | |
| Auto repair/maintenance | |
| Home repair/maintenance | |
| Insurance | |
| Total Monthly Expenses | |

Documents Checklist

Legal Documents

- Marriage license
- Prenuptial or postnuptial agreements
- Birth certificates or adoption documents for each child for whom you or your spouse are responsible.
- Social Security numbers for each member of the household
- Divorce decree from former marriage

Financial Documents

- Account statements for bank accounts, loans, IRAs, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and other investments
- The most recent salary check stubs
- Tax returns for the past five years
- The most recent real estate tax bills
- Life insurance policies
- Loan documents either of you have signed
- Wills, living trusts, and other estate-planning documents
- Credit report from Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion for you and your spouse

Priorities for Negotiating the Settlement

| Item | Non-negotiable | Of great importance | Of little importance |
|---|----------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Language of the Divorce | | | |
| “Fault” divorce | ✓ | | |
| Description of grounds | ✓ | | |
| Custody or “conservatorship” of the children, including the following <i>exclusive</i> rights: | | | |
| The right to establish the primary residence of the children within the current state | | | |
| The right to establish the primary residence of the children across state lines | | | |
| The right to consent to medical, surgical, and dental treatment involving invasive procedures | | | |
| The right to consent to psychiatric and psychological treatment | | | |
| The right to consent to travel across state lines and abroad | | | |
| The right to receive and give receipt for periodic payments for support and to manage these funds | | | |
| The right to represent the children in legal action and to make other substantial legal decisions | | | |
| The right to consent to marriage and to enlistment in the armed forces of the United States | | | |
| The right to make decisions concerning the children’s education | | | |
| The right to the services and earnings of the children | | | |
| The right to manage the estates of the children | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Residence of the Children | | | |
| During the week: | | | |
| On weekends: | | | |
| On holidays: | | | |
| Visitation with the Children | | | |
| Unsupervised visits | | | |
| Supervised visits (describe limitations): | | | |
| During the week: | | | |
| On weekends: | | | |
| On holidays: | | | |
| Monetary Support | | | |
| For the spouse | | | |
| For the children | | | |
| Division of Assets (List only nonnegotiable assets) | | | |
| | | | |
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| | | | |
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| | | | |
| Division of Debt (List only nonnegotiable debt) | | | |
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