

and advice of others in discovering how to save your marriage, but be cautious about what you choose to reveal and to whom.

It's essential for us to have emotional support in tough times, but it's natural to try to find people who will support and defend *our* position. Are you willing to seek the advice of true friends—those who are not only positive and encouraging, but who will “tell it to you straight”? In other words, a true friend will be honest with you and tell you where you could change and improve the relationship as well.

Be wary about listening to those who may counsel you to bail out of the marriage. Remember, you are committed to saving it!

It is also wise to keep the intimate details of marital problems, especially matters of infidelity, private. Juicy details quickly become the fodder for gossip mills, making you and/or your mate the center of attention. Such talk will only hurt both you and the marriage, and it can make it increasingly difficult for the marriage to succeed. When private details start flying around, not only will you have the original problem to work on, but you will also face the weight of negative public opinion.

It is also wise to be *very* careful about confiding intimate details to, or seeking the comfort of, a member of the opposite sex. People who feel wounded emotionally tend to be more vulnerable than they know. The last thing you need is to have a desire for support and encouragement turn into another affair!

Seek out wise and trained counselors. Competent pastors and wise counselors can give you a better perspective on yourself and how to save your marriage. They can guide you through the process of healing and restoring the love and trust of marriage. They can be there for you if your resolve falters and help you develop realistic expectations for yourself and your mate.

Learn from the past

Someone once said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over, but expecting a differ-

ent result. So as you make progress in restoring your marriage, be sure to recognize the lessons you are learning so you don't repeat them. It is right and proper to sincerely apologize and ask forgiveness for unkind words or thoughtless actions. But it is also important to evaluate how, when and why we might have acted in that manner and take steps to change.

Once again, a competent pastor or counselor can be invaluable to you. A wise neutral third party can point out areas you may not recognize and can give you techniques for change. He can help you understand signs you may have missed or ways in which you were failing to appreciate and meet the needs of your mate. Those important lessons must be learned and put into practice from now on.

God hates divorce

The great Creator of marriage tells us plainly in Malachi 2:16 that He hates divorce. It was never His intent that human beings should marry, then later hurt each other to the point that the marriage dissolves and a family is shattered.

He wants you to be happy, and He wants you to be in a loving, solid and stable marriage. Contrary to the sad experience of millions of people, that kind of marriage really is possible! It isn't easy, but if both of you are willing to make the commitment to each other and your marriage, it is possible.

Commitment, prayer, patience, wise counsel and a willingness to learn from the past and change are all solid steps toward helping you save your marriage.

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How to Save Your Marriage

Marriage problems face almost every married couple; many are on the brink of divorce. Invest time now and learn how to save your marriage!

The conversation at the kitchen table went on for over an hour as the couple sometimes tearfully described the tattered remnants of what used to be a marriage.

No big incident had blown their relationship apart. Rather, they had experienced a continual series of hurts and offenses that created more and more tension and drove them farther apart. The relationship had disintegrated to the point where civil discussions were few and far between. It seemed the marriage was all but over.

Tragically, millions of couples repeat a similar scenario over and over again every year. Various researchers report that roughly half of all marriages eventually end in divorce. This is not how marriage was designed to be, and it is not what the Creator of mankind wants to see.

Marriage is a blessing from God

The Bible describes marriage as a special relationship between a man and a woman that is to be cherished and treasured. “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD,” Solomon wrote to his son (Proverbs 18:22). God describes marriage as a wonderful relationship to look forward to—it is a blessing from God!

Solomon also wrote in Proverbs 5:18 to “rejoice with the wife of your youth.” The marriage relationship should be one from which we can draw strength, comfort, encouragement, happiness and joy. That isn’t to say that every day will be one of bliss without trials or struggles, but God intends a husband and wife to draw together and work together to face their challenges side-by-side. When they work as a team through the ups and downs of building, raising and providing for a family, they can look back and “rejoice” even after the wife or husband of their youth has been with them for 30, 40, 50 or more years!

If your marriage seems to be struggling or even teetering on the precipice of divorce, you probably are looking for concrete steps for how to save your marriage. While no one can give you a guarantee, there are things you can do to give your marriage the best chance of success possible.

Commitment is the key

Ask yourself first of all, are you 100 percent committed to your marriage? Real life isn’t like what Hollywood portrays in the movies, and problems aren’t all resolved in the space of a 30-minute TV sitcom. A good marriage requires dedicated hard work from both husband and wife. You must be fully committed to your marriage if you are going to save it!

Commitment to anything in life has a profound impact on your thoughts and actions. If a child dreams of being an Olympic ice-skater, he or she must commit to many years of training and practice. Commitment to that goal inspires the young skater to make sacrifices. It drives virtually everything he or she does toward that goal, from getting up for the 5 a.m. practices, to following a strict sleep schedule and diet, to missing activities other young people may enjoy. Commitment dictates practicing, learning new jumps, traveling to meets and improving skills on the ice with the goal of being among the best in the world!

Similarly, commitment to marriage will drive a couple to make the sacrifices needed to put a marriage on safe

and solid ground. It means leaving some of your wants and desires behind if they interfere with your marriage, because you’re committed—you value the relationship more than you value other things in life. Do *you* have that level of commitment? Are you dedicated to finding how to save your marriage?

Pray for your mate

Since God is the designer of marriage in the first place, it should be quite natural that we would seek wisdom and guidance from Him when we find our own marriages aren’t what they should be. But it is amazing how many times we tend to overlook this powerful tool.

King Hezekiah set us an example when he was faced with a huge problem he didn’t know how to deal with—in his case, a threat from an enemy. Hezekiah took a threatening letter he received and spread it out

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before God, explaining the problem and asking for wisdom and help (Isaiah 37:14-20).

You can follow that example and take marital problems to God, lay them all out before Him and ask His guidance and wisdom for how to save your marriage.

After laying out the problems and your perceptions before God in prayer, take time to pray specifically *for* your mate. Notice the distinction: pray *for* your mate rather than *about* your mate! Spend time praying for God to help and bless your mate, thanking Him for bringing him or her into your life. Not only may God answer your prayer with blessings and good things for your mate, but the very act of praying for him or her can have a positive effect on you as well.

If you are committed to finding how to save your marriage, make praying for your mate a part of your daily routine.

Be patient

Marriage problems don’t generally occur overnight. Perhaps a series of hurts and offenses, maybe without any malicious intent or forethought, has created a wall between you that now seems impenetrable. Such walls usually form because of a lack of attention and care, combined with our innately selfish human nature.

Or perhaps a traumatic incident like an affair has appeared to come out of the blue. However, unexpected acts like that don’t tend to just happen. While adultery is reprehensible and destructive, research shows that oftentimes people give in to temptation because hurt feelings, harsh words and feelings of isolation or not being appreciated are eroding the trust and loving bond of the marriage relationship.

(Note: Recognizing long-term problems is not an excuse for the sin. In Matthew 19:9, Jesus Christ specifically allowed divorce in cases of “sexual immorality,” but He did not require divorce. If you are reading this, it seems you are committed to finding how to save your marriage, and to do that requires understanding of such long-term problems.)

The point is, problems don’t generally come into existence overnight, and they will not be resolved overnight. We have to be realistic and understand that a good long talk or a single weekend retreat is not going to make problems that took years to build simply vanish.

Once again, your commitment to your marriage may be tested, and it will be revealed by the amount of patience you show. You must be patient with your mate, and you must also be patient with yourself. Change may not come quickly or easily, and two people seldom change at the same rate of speed, but you must patiently keep doing your part. Remember, you are working through the problems with the goal of restoring your marriage to stability and happiness.

Seek wise counsel

None of us see ourselves as clearly and objectively as we may need to in order to resolve serious problems in our marriages. You may well need to seek the counsel