

Can I Divorce My Spouse Because of Abandonment or Abuse?

by Shane Idleman

The Bible teaches that divorce and remarriage should be approached with caution and that reconciliation is always the ultimate goal.

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Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 61:1-3, Matthew 11:28-30, Matthew 19:9, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, Ephesians 4:31-32, James 1:5, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Divorce", "Restoration and Healing"

Description

Shane Idleman addresses the complex issues surrounding divorce due to abandonment and abuse, emphasizing that while God desires reconciliation, there are circumstances where separation may be necessary. He highlights the importance of seeking God's guidance in these situations, as only He knows the heart and the true nature of the relationship. Shane encourages individuals to focus on their relationship with God, to seek healing and restoration, and to understand that divorce is not God's ideal but can be a reality in certain cases. He also stresses the significance of forgiveness and the dangers of bitterness, urging couples to work through their issues rather than resorting to separation or divorce without biblical grounds.

Transcript

Matthew 19, we ended right around verse 9 where Jesus says, and I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. And whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. Now this is a very volatile topic because it creates a lot of friction on both sides.

We've already had people emailing us, you know, trying to correct theology here. They think that the only way you can get remarried is if your spouse dies. But we looked at that last week where Jesus said, except for sexual immorality.

And I would encourage you, if you weren't here, go back and listen to last week's message. But tonight I actually titled the message, Can I Divorce Because of Abandonment and Abuse? Can I divorce my spouse over abandonment or abuse? Physical abuse, mental, emotional abuse. Because we tackled adultery last week, and now we're going to tackle this topic.

But I want to say this up front, as I said last week. On this area we move very cautiously and very carefully. And I truly believe that only God can answer this question.

I don't think a pastor can tell you, yes, you should divorce, or no, you shouldn't, or whatever. Because there's always two or three sides, and there's something in the middle that we don't know about. Where God knows the heart, God knows the situation.

So anytime I talk about a subject like this, I point people back to the relationship with God. Their walk with Christ, look to the Word, look to obedience to His Word. And let Him direct you, let Him guide you.

Because this is a serious issue, isn't it? I mean, you're talking about marriage, and divorce, and remarriage. And the heart of God is reconciliation. I'm a proponent of restoration and reconciliation.

And I actually came across a study that I saw some time ago this week, and I want to share it with you. A focus on the family newsletter stated that when a research team studied 5,232 married adults who were interviewed in the late 1980s, they discovered that 645 of them were unhappily married. Five years later, these same adults, some divorced, separated, or still married, were interviewed again.

The study revealed that two-thirds, two-thirds of the unhappily married spouses who stayed together were actually happier five years later. The opposite is true for those who divorced. Although those divorced may temporarily escape the pain, divorce introduces new emotional and relational difficulties.

And this is a good point to remind you that the grass is not always greener on the other side. You know what the old saying is? The grass is green, it's where you water it. That's how you get green grass, is you water it.

And you water it, and you water it. So we look at this, and I've talked to many couples. You've seen it yourself, the devastation that divorce brings.

And often the grass is not greener on the other side. It's just as dead and just as dry. And that's why we encourage people to work through it.

And God wants to bring restoration. And it's not a pretty topic sometimes. Sometimes there's always an exception to what I'm preaching about in regard to sometimes a person gets out of a destructive relationship.

There's adultery, there's abuse, different things. And they find somebody else, and God really blesses that marriage and gives them wonderful children. But that's the exception.

Many times the devastation that comes after divorce is debilitating, and it hurts the kids. And we know that. But let me take just a minute, take this opportunity to speak to the Christian who has no solid scriptural grounds for divorce, yet they chose to leave.

This is serious. We would not intentionally walk into the enemy's camp. Yet this is what we do when we walk out from under God's covering.

The choices we make today will influence the quality of our life tomorrow. Sin takes us farther than we want to go, keeps us longer than we want to stay, and costs us more than we want to pay. For some, it's not too late.

If they return to God, He can restore their marriage. And I always want to throw that out there, because in the Christian community, I would say that, at least from what I observed, many of the divorces and separations are not biblical, to just be completely honest with you. They're not only not biblical, I think most people can restore and work through that.

The large majority, I know the last ten or so, last dozen or so marriages that I saw ended in divorce, I would have to say that I would not agree with any of them. There was always hope in all of those. If both the spouses just came and sought God, God could rebuild.

So I think this is a big area, because Christians now, we've kind of come alongside the world in this area of no-fault divorce. And we can just divorce for any cause, and let me find this one, and let me go to this new model, and this isn't working. And on this topic, though, I don't want to minimize difficult marriages.

You realize that, right? I'm not just saying, oh, suck it up, get through it. You know, because those who have been trapped in a difficult marriage know that it's prison. It is a prison, that it's hard to get out of.

So I don't want to minimize that either. And I also want to offer hope for the hurting. Because when I gave the message last week, we also get responses from people, or some of you who were here, saying, Shane, I didn't divorce correctly, and I'm in a marriage I probably shouldn't be.

I don't know what to do. There's anxiety, and there's depression. Well, I want to encourage hope that God looks at your heart.

If the couple would acknowledge, Lord, this was not of your will. We maybe lived together beforehand. We did these things.

If you get back into, the best way to get back into God's arms of forgiveness and restoration is through repentance. That's how you bridge the gap. That's how you restore that relationship.

So there's always hope for the hurting. There's always hope to say, Lord, this relationship that I'm in now, this marriage, is not right, but it's too late. I can't go back 20 years and reverse everything and fix all those things.

God, I wish I could. He sees your heart. He looks at the heart of man, and then he begins to rebuild and restore.

And I actually read some very interesting things online that I probably shouldn't have, of people giving scenarios that if you're in a marriage that you shouldn't be, you need to divorce that spouse and go back to your previous spouse from 15 years ago. And if they're married now, they need to divorce their spouse and go back to you because both of you are living in sin. Hmm.

Kick the kids to the curb and go back, huh? I mean, if you just think this stuff through, but that's the letter of the law, not the spirit of Christ. To go back to your spouse from 15 years ago, divorce your wife, give up your kids, and go back to hold on to some doctrinal issue, I don't think is the heart of God, number one. Number two is, if the heart repents and acknowledges, Lord, we made a mistake.

This was not of your will, but we both acknowledge it, we repent, and now we want to seek you. I don't think God's going, no, no, too bad. You're going to suffer for the rest of your life, you miserable sinners.

You made a huge mistake. That's not God. God is wanting us to, there's hope for the hurting.

As long as we redirect. So that's what I tell couples, because I've met them who, they're actually married to the person they cheated on with their spouse. That's what we call a sticky situation.

There's some difficulty there. I mean, you know, and they're like, well, do I divorce them now, 20 years later? My advice is always seek God. Get back into repentance and following his will.

Let God restore those years, somehow, that the canker worm took and the locust, and that's metaphorically speaking of how the devourer can devour things. So that's what I would encourage you. There's always hope for the hurting.

If you're in a wrong relationship, well, if you're in a wrong relationship, I better clarify that, and you can get out, don't only get out, run out. And I know there's people right now that I know of that are dating people they shouldn't be dating. They're engaged to people they should not be engaged with.

And the spouse is still wanting restoration, but they have, what did we talk about last week? Backup plan. Plan B. Plan A doesn't work out. So in that regard, I'm saying run for cover, break off that relationship, whatever it takes.

Here's what happens, though. They fall in love with the other person, and they fell out of love with that person. Actually, they didn't fall into love.

They fell into lust, but that's a whole other story, because love is patient. Love is kind. Love doesn't envy.

It doesn't boast. It's not rude. It's not proud.

They don't really have the right definition of love. They lust after this person. They've given their attraction.

Now they're attracted to this person, and they can't go back to this person, because I don't like them anymore. Well, love doesn't leave you. You leave love.

And if God is saying this is a wrong relationship, the best thing you can do is remove your feelings from the equation and go do what is right and watch the feelings follow. Because the majority of the frustration that comes from pastoral counseling in this area is they say, I don't love them anymore, but I love this new person. God must want me to be with them.

No, it's called sin, and you're going in a very bad direction. You don't trust your feelings. I would have to say that the majority of the time, that's the problem.

Plan B. Plan B prevents the majority of restorations that I have seen in all of my Christian ministry. Plan B? Yeah. The girl or the boy on the side.

You know what I'm talking about. Dating. Can't give them up.

Can't release them. That's why when somebody's separated or even recently divorced, I always encourage you, you don't date anybody. You date God.

That's who you're dating. That's who you're spending time with. Because it always gets in the way.

It always messes with their feelings. Then we start thinking, I wonder if God really brought me this person. I know the Bible says this, and I know it really isn't right.

But maybe God, no, that's not. God always does things according to his word and according to his nature. So be very careful in that area.

And we kind of touched on a lot of that last week. So this week, what about abandonment? Can I divorce my spouse because of abandonment? They've left me. Well, let's read 1 Corinthians 7.10. Paul speaking here.

Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord. A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.

And a husband is not to divorce his wife. Boy, if that scripture was more clearly taught and was brought up more often in pre-marriage counseling and in marriage counseling, that would stop a lot of the divorces that are going on in our nation that are not biblical. I don't know about you, but that's pretty clear.

If there's not the scriptural grounds that we talked about that Jesus gave yesterday, a wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. So if there's a separation, the two options are reconciliation or stay single.

Single. Reconciliation or stay single. Not go visit Chippendales.

Is that even still around? I don't know. I'll probably date myself. Not go find Mr. or Mrs. right now.

That's the option. So many people, when they separate, say, okay, you're separated. Guess what? You're staying single according to God's will or you're going to be reconciled later.

Those are your options. I don't like those options. Well, that's what's really crystal clear here.

Now, again, this is just my opinion on this issue, but I believe that abuse would follow under this umbrella. If a person is being emotionally abused, and some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. The majority of you probably don't.

But emotional abuse is... If I could tell you some of the stories. It's the person who leaves two teaspoons of milk in the milk carton in the refrigerator because they want to get back at that person. And they just make their life miserable.

Emotional abuse. They tell them off. They use the kids against them.

They use scripture against them. They just live in misery. It's almost like the enemy has sent them to emotionally abuse their spouse.

And the stories I've heard are... I mean, it would make you cringe. So if a spouse leaves because of that, I believe it would fall under this heading that they are to remain single or be reconciled later. Again, my opinion.

I don't see where... Now, there are good Bible teachers who would say that physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, that you could divorce on that ground and go remarry somebody else. In my opinion, I think it would fall under this heading of if she does depart, let her remain unmarried. Or be reconciled later on if that changes a person.

And here's one thing about separation. Sometimes I'll get a call that, you know, a counselor I recommend, because I do recommend people quite often to marriage family therapists who can better help and can meet with the person eight to 10 times and really walk them through this whole thing. And the marriage and family therapist sometimes will recommend, you guys need to separate.

And then I get the call, why'd you recommend this person? They're recommending me, I divorce my spouse. No, they didn't recommend divorce. They recommended separation.

Because often, we need to separate and remove ourselves from the environment. Number one, to see how bad this is getting. When the spouse packs up their stuff, takes the kids and says, I'm outta here.

That's ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. Wake up call, many times. And that's what Paul says here.

If they are to depart, let them remain unmarried. Let them remain separated. Or be reconciled later on.

And a lot of times when we separate, God begins to work in our hearts. Because we're separated, we're seeking him. We see the chaos that we're creating.

Because a lot of times if you stay with somebody, you're enabling them, right? It's a wife who keeps coming back to the drunken husband and keeps getting hit and hit, week in and week out, keeps coming back, keeps coming back. Why is he gonna stop? Of course, there's legal reasons and calling the police and different things. But many times, if the wife leaves, takes the kids, you're not even gonna know where I'm at, that shakes him up, that wakes him up, or her.

It can go the opposite direction, too, nowadays, right? So that's the point, I believe, of the scripture. If it's unbearable, if there's a challenge, if there's a difficult, if she departs, she needs to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. Spousal abuse is an epidemic, too, in the church.

It's cruel, it's violent treatment. It can be physical abuse, of course. Physical abuse.

And if a man ever touches a woman in that way, I think they're a coward. I think deep repentance needs to take place. And I think that that is something that you should be ashamed of.

And it's not macho, it's not man-like. Well, my dad did it, well, you shouldn't. That's not Christ-like.

Repentance needs to take place. And if those things are happening in the home, then I believe the spouse, especially what about if there's safety issues with little children involved? I mean, I know of a man who grabbed his little children in that infant, you know, shaken baby syndrome where you can shake them to death and threw the child or different things and the child just, I think the mom or the dad, sometimes in the reverse, has the responsibility to remove that child from that atmosphere. Again, not go plan B. Not go meet somebody at Schooners.

Not go, you know, go to Vegas and just let my hair down with the girls. No, that's not the time for this. Because that's what happens.

Everybody's laughing, right? But that's what people do. I'm separated, that means I'm free. No, it doesn't.

It does not mean you're free. It means now you've got more time to seek God. And so when there's a spousal abuse on either side, emotional, physical abuse, I believe that there comes a time when the person can leave and they remain unmarried or be reconciled later to their husband.

Now, what about if the spouse meets somebody, they get married, they're moving on with their life. Well, Shane, can I move on with my life? What'd I say at the beginning? Don't ask me. Only God can answer questions like that.

That's a good argument, though. I mean, if the spouse has moved on, if they're an unbeliever, if they've cheated and they've committed altering and they're moving on with their life, you need to take that to God and let Him answer that question. Because ultimately, you need to have peace on that direction.

You need to have peace. And you need to say, okay, Lord, there's consequences to this hurt, but I have peace about what you're doing now in my life. And let God answer it.

Because if I answer it, that's not gonna hold you. Every month it goes by, I wonder if Pastor Shane was right. Oh, no.

I don't know if he was right or not. Take it to God. And it's a difficult situation.

We have to remember that divorce was not God's idea. He hates divorce. And when that happens, it rips the two apart.

And then we wonder, oh, Lord, why aren't I whole again? I wanna be whole again. I don't wanna have any of these consequences. No, there's consequences.

There's consequences for our actions. There's consequences for divorce. But God can rebuild and redeem all of that.

However, it's not gonna be void of pain, which we all want, right? If He could just remove the pain of divorce, the pain of separation, I would be good, God. But if I could stand up here another hour, I could give you testimony after testimony after testimony that it was actually the pain that brought the prodigal son home. It was the pain that brought the marriage back together.

Without that pain, many times we won't change. Now, verse 12. 1 Corinthians 7, 12.

But to the rest, he's saying to the rest of the people out there, not the Lord say, let me read that again. 1 Corinthians 7, 12. But to the rest I, there we go, I forgot that, I, not the Lord say, and this is interesting, Paul sometimes will say, the Lord says this, and then he says, but I say this, and it's not necessarily a commandment from the Lord, but Paul's feeling led to write this.

If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. So that, unless I'm reading this wrong, that would tell me, if a brother has a wife who does not believe, and she wants to leave, then there might be grounds there, and we're gonna get to that in a minute. If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.

And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. So we have this imagery now of people coming to know Christ, they're filled with the Spirit of God, they're Christians, and their spouse is not. Paul's saying, listen, if they're willing to live with you, make that marriage work.

Again, not talking about adultery, and abandonment, and abuse, or any of those things, but the unbelieving spouse, and I know many in this situation, if they're willing to live with you, make that marriage work. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the

husband, otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. Would somebody like to give me a commentary on that one? Okay, good, you don't have to.

Here's what I'm thinking. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified. Now, sometimes people confuse this with saved.

Okay, because the unbelieving wife is staying together with her husband, he's sanctified now, he's good with God. No, he's not good with God salvation-wise. Actually, if you look up the word sanctified, it means making something legitimate, or making something binding.

So my opinion, what Paul's saying here, is the unbelieving husband, is the marriage is legitimate in the sight of God, because the woman, or the other spouse, who is a believer, God recognizes that marriage. It's sanctified, it's legitimate, and now because of that, your children are clean. They are holy, they are right before God.

It's not a marriage of fornication, or it's not these children of a marriage that God doesn't recognize. So the believing spouse brings into the marriage the sanctification aspect of legitimacy before God. God says, I recognize this marriage, that this believer is contending for their marriage, they're staying in this marriage, and because of this, the kids are under that covering, that holiness, not saved.

In other words, if God recognizes something, and God says, I recognize this, this is legitimate, I'll keep my hand of protection on it, that's a good thing. Remember back when Jesus was walking on the earth, people accused him of being born of fornication, not being a legitimate marriage. He was born illegitimate, not legitimate, is what they said.

The people accused him of that, but of course we know that's not the case. So Paul's saying here, if the believing spouse can stay in the marriage, it still makes that marriage legitimate in the eyes of God, and that he will still have his hand of protection or look upon that house and see those kids as still holy and set apart. Now what about if the kids are under a certain age and they're little kids, will they still go to heaven? Boy, you guys have a lot of questions.

On that note, I would encourage you to go to YouTube, type in John Piper, will infants go to heaven, or will kids go to heaven when they die? In three minutes, he does a much better job of what I can do up here. I don't really think he's saying that they'll be saved, that the kids are now saved, don't worry about it. The kids are holy, and holy, again, is set apart for God.

There's something there where God's gonna work in that marriage, the believing spouse is bringing something to that marriage, through their prayers, through their broken spirit seeking God, so that marriage is legitimate and binding in God's eyes. But if the unbeliever departs, let them depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases because God has called us to peace.

So you have an unbeliever that wants to stay with the marriage, the spouse, the believing spouse needs to make that work and stay there so the marriage is legitimate there, the kids are under that covering, under that protection of God seeing that legitimate marriage. But what about if the believer says, or the unbeliever says, bye, see you later, nice knowing you, I'm not coming back. Well, believe it or not, there's two views on this.

One view says this does not mean that when a Christian is deserted by an unbelieving spouse, he or she is free to remarry. I think John Piper would actually say this. He believes that remarriage can only take

place when the spouse dies.

And then you have people like John MacArthur, Chuck Smith, a lot of other Bible teachers who say in the case of abandonment and adultery. Adultery from what we taught last week, abandonment from what we're reading right here. Here's what they would say, it means that the Christian is not bound to fight in order to preserve togetherness.

So he's saying you can't divorce them, you're just not bound to still fight and contend for your marriage. To me, that doesn't make sense. Because I'm still bound to the marriage.

Okay, I won't fight and contend for it, but I'm still bound to this. The unbeliever left, they're gone, I'm still bound to this. So I don't see that it means you're not, I think the word bondage is not bound, bondage, doulos, D-O-U-L-O-O-S, or something along that line in the Greek language.

It's not bound to something, you're no longer bound, you're free. The word is almost like being tied to something. And I'm bound to this, I can't move forward.

Paul says you're not under bondage, that is cut loose when the unbelieving spouse leaves. Now, that doesn't mean you go date somebody a week later. In my opinion, again, this is my opinion, when something like this occurs, a significant amount of time must pass.

Because you don't know if the person left only for a season. And if God's, you see, it all goes back to what I, I mean, this whole two part series could be summed up in a couple sentences. Seek God with all your heart, and let him direct you.

You just saved me two hours worth of notes. Because that's what this person's, if we're seeking God, God, the unbelieving spouse has left. Let me give you, you know what, I didn't have this in my notes, I don't know if I wanna share this, but I will.

This is what happened to me. 1998, divorce, adultery, abandonment, she left. Moved in with somebody, actually married the person.

And I waited three years. 98, 99, 2000, 2001. Remained single three years after the divorce.

Prayed for restoration, but I could just sense in my heart, God was, it was not, you know, when he's leading something, that's why these guys that email me that I'm in sin, and I'm an adulterer, and I need to repent, and all that, I just laugh at them because they don't have the heart of Christ. They don't know what the hell I went through. I'm not cussing there, I'm just saying they don't know the hell I went through.

Right, you got the distinction there. Some of you are like, oh, he just cussed. No, I went through hell.

And you've been there, some of you have been there, you know that. It's hell on earth. So for three years, contending, not dating, just waiting on God, but could feel that he's, and growing now in the word.

I mean, that's what turned me around. The word of God became active, and alive, and worship, couldn't get more church. And she's going that direction, I'm going this direction.

I'm on fire for God, and she's not. And I'm just, three years later, and then I met Morgan, actually at a church Sunday night, and we hit it off well, and I'm like, oh, oh, God, are you doing something here? Man, I don't know, you know, this is, the three years, I've been three years, and what am I supposed to do in

this? I just had peace and different things, but I went and I asked my mom, and she actually said the same thing I was thinking. She said, why don't you email your ex-wife, tell her the situation, and see what happens.

And this is a year, I haven't talked to her at least a year, year and a half. So I remember I told Morgan, I have to do this. So I emailed her, I said, hey, I've met somebody, I just want to make sure I'm completely released, and I can move forward, and it was almost like a mocking email.

It was like, get over it, please move on. Would you move on with your life? Leave me alone. I'm living with this person, we're getting married, and I felt that was my closure.

I'm abandoned and moving on. It took a significant amount of time, waited on God, waited on God, waited on God, felt the biological clock ticking, right? Tick, tick, 29, tick, tick, 30, tick, tick, 31, 31, what am I doing? I'm gonna die here. But that rushes, right? You think, I gotta have kids now.

But now I'm so glad I had them later in life, because it would have been ugly had I had kids in my 20s. It would not have been good. So God's working on, so that's what I meant about a significant amount of time needs to pass.

I sought God to the point of, I've sought him enough on this, three years and I'm ready, I feel he's released me. However, people will still say, I'm in sin, I'm an adulterer, I need to divorce my wife and go back to my ex, that is blasphemy, I believe. That is not the heart of God.

They've got a legalistic, arrogant, Pharisee heart. And I guarantee you they've never went through that. Because you're experiencing the God's power, his redemptive work.

Now, they also say that if they abandon, you can't move forward. You have to just stay single. And to me, that would be bondage.

That would be true bondage. Okay, I'm 29, never remarry again, just stay single. I wouldn't be pastoring this church.

I don't have too many single pastors. Do you know any? I don't know. I wouldn't have a wife and these kids.

I wouldn't have any of that. I would still be just bound to that. To me, that would be true bondage.

That's why Paul says, you're not bound in such cases. If the unbelieving spouse leaves, they have no plan on returning to move on with their life, you're no longer bound. Bound to what, Paul? Bound to that relationship.

Move on because God wants you to live in peace. I don't know how else anybody can read into that something different. But that's a big debate.

If you go online, you'll see both sides. And it's funny. You see a gracious, understanding, loving side, and then you see these guys who just love to throw stones.

And they're just so arrogant. Capital letters. Like they're God's gift to criticism.

I mean, they're gifting us criticism. They're modern day Pharisees. It's okay like John Piper to hold that view and have a loving, gracious, understanding heart and still hold your view.

I got that. That's fine. But the way a lot of these people come across, they're probably addicted to porn and they're committing adultery in their mind, yet they're going to chastise people for following the scriptural course.

It's just sometimes it irks me. Can you tell? Oh, you can't? So anyway, that was the second view that I hold to. When a spouse leaves and has moved on with no intention of returning, God does not want the other spouse to be bound to the past.

He wants us to live in peace. But does this mean that the spouse who remains is now free to remarry? Yes. Again, in my opinion, if they end the marriage, in other words, too, if they desert you and they divorce you, they're also divorcing you.

I mean, if paperwork has... Here's another thing. I meet people and they're dating. It's like, yeah, I was married.

I haven't divorced yet, though. Okay, hold on. State of California still recognizes your marriage.

Yep. And you're not divorced. You're just separated.

Yep. But in God's eyes, we're divorced. Well, careful.

Avoid appearance of evil. If it still says on paper you're married and you're moving on with plan B, it's just junk, isn't it? It's ugly. That's what divorce is.

It's ugly. When kids are involved in different things, too. See, you have to be careful in this area.

They are no longer slaves. They are released. Not under bondage signifies a release.

John MacArthur said, the believer is under no obligation in such a case. So if a believer's wanting to contend for their marriage, the unbeliever says, I'm leaving you. I'm divorcing you.

I'm done. I'm out of here. The believer, in my opinion, is not under the bondage of that relationship anymore.

I don't know what else that could mean. I honestly don't. I've got a headache over thinking about it so much, actually.

I did. But again, a significant amount of time needs to elapse. This may reveal if the person left only for a season or has chosen to leave permanently.

That's why I love all these scriptures. Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. So I could go into the new relationship knowing I've waited on God.

I've renewed my strength. But those who rush, and it's always we're rushing, right? We meet somebody. We're like, oh, I met them, and they're attractive, and now I think that's God.

No, probably not. Probably not. You're still what I call wounded, what I call rebound, right? Bing, bing, bing, bing.

Let me start dating. No, you need to start healing again. And you'll start looking for the Proverbs 31 woman, man.

And women, you'll start looking for a man who's following wholeheartedly after Christ, and then you just try to keep up with him. You start to look for the right things. Those on rebounds often don't look for the right things.

They'll take whatever's out there. I'm just lonely. I'm desperate.

I'm needy. Oh, let me just find this person. That's what a rebound is.

It's rebounding off of the old relationship you've got because we hate being alone. Truth told, I love being alone. If I were to give anything, well, I may have worded that correctly.

But to have three years of just me seeking God was unbelievable. I mean, you can't put, I was not in a hurry. It was like you go to your, you know, I'm just following God.

I was going to church on a different church in LA on Wednesdays, one on Fridays. I was just seeking God. And you could sit and read the Bible for two hours.

Try doing that with little kids. You know, you have to get up early now. And I could just worship all day long, and I could seek his face.

And that's invaluable. And I see so many people, they waste that time. They waste it.

Or marry couples without kids. Don't waste that time. Cherish it now.

Because you'll look back and go, I wish I had that time, that quiet time. So use that time to build your relationship with God. Now, here's where it gets tricky.

But what if the spouse who chose to leave is a believer but has the fruit of an unbeliever? Have you ever thought of that? I actually had a gentleman a while back. His grounds for leaving his divorce, his grounds for divorce for leaving his wife because she showed signs of an unbeliever. And I had to remind him, no, it's because you're making the environment unbearable for her.

That's why she's leaving. So see how we can get tricky with things? Oh, she's leaving me. She's acting this.

She's taking me to court. She's taking all my money. That's an unbeliever.

No, you've been a jerk. You created a very destructive environment through anger and addiction and controlling and manipulating. That's why.

So we have to be careful here. Because we like to kind of shape things in our direction, don't we? But the point is good here. If a spouse who chose us to leave, they say they're a believer, but there's no fruit.

There's nothing. We don't go by what they say. We go by what they act like.

So if a spouse leaves, they say, yeah, I'm a Christian. I went to church from time to time. But there's no relationship with God.

There's no sincere humility or genuine repentance or love for God and his word, a love for truth, a love for what is doing right. They look just like the world. Then they could be an unbeliever, disguised as a believer.

Do you know that happens? A lot more than you think. A lot more than you think. Because it's very easy to say I'm a Christian.

It's very hard to live it out, but also to repent for the prideful human heart to say I need God. I need him. I've repented.

I need him. And because of that, now he's changed my life. I'm on fire for God.

So we have to be careful in this area. If the spouse chose to leave, are they an unbeliever or are they a believer? What's the answer, Shane? Well, what have I been saying? Seek God. Let him guide.

See, that's why people get mad when I tell them this, but I truly believe that he will guide you. This isn't some guy going, oh, I don't know, a taxi driver in New York, let me try. I mean, this is God.

He says, if you commit your life to me, if you give me your heart, if you seek me with all your heart, you will find me. I will direct you. God will never let a person down who's truly directing them.

He's not gonna go, oh, woman, you've been seeking me, you've been fasting, you've been praying. This, I'm gonna close all these doors. I'm gonna fool you.

I'm gonna hide this over here and trick you down. You know, if you're doing that, he's gonna open doors. He's gonna make things evident.

He's gonna make things clear. He's a good God that wants to guide. And I tell people, seek him with all your heart.

No, I need answers now. I need to know what to do now. No, you don't.

You need to seek God. Tell me what I need to do. The Bible says I can divorce him for this reason.

But what does God say? He will direct, what am I trying to say here? Oh, seek him with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind, and he will lead you. He will direct you. That's a promise you can take to the bank.

And if the truth be told, I guess I'll let it out now. When people get mad at me when saying that, it's because they don't wanna do that. I wasn't born yesterday.

I'm very well aware that I just struck a chord. Because the heart that wants to seek God will do that. The heart that wants to fight against God will not.

And it's often, I'll tell spouses all the time, I'll tell you tonight, if bitterness and unforgiveness is in your heart, you will not see restoration. Listen, if God in Christ Jesus forgave us, who in the world do we think we are to hold grudges and not offer forgiveness? Unforgiveness. And I can tell when a spouse's heart isn't right.

It's just one question. Have you completely forgiven them? Will you forgive them? And you just, you know the face gets red and the veins and like, I'm trying or they did this or they did that. And unforgiveness,

unforgiveness.

Here's the thing about unforgiveness and bitterness. You will not win. You will not win.

You will take this to your grave. And I've seen a lot of bitter, angry people on their deathbed or those close to dying, older in their age, bitter and unfree, and they're just gonna hold on to it till the day they die. When God says release it.

Now here's the interesting thing. Forgiveness is a decision, but trust is a process. So I can forgive you, but I don't have to trust you.

See, it's okay to say you have to earn back my See, you know, but forgiveness means I'm releasing this debt. I'm releasing this. I'm not holding it on anymore.

Now you're gonna deal with God. Somebody gave me this actually a year ago. I remember it's in here.

Forgiveness doesn't excuse their behavior. Forgiveness prevents their behavior from destroying my heart. See, we forget that unforgiveness is toxic.

You know, I'm a big fan of pointing out toxic foods, right? I wanna eat healthy. Well, there's toxic emotions. It's funny how the Psalms would say certain things like rotting of the bones or this or the heartbreak or it's these unforgiveness and bitterness.

It's toxic. You just stay in this bitter and the word of God's not gonna come alive. If I'm holding bitterness and unforgiveness in my heart, you think the word of God's gonna come alive? You think I'm gonna sit here and worship? I'll be saying get through this so I can get out of here.

Why? Because I don't wanna let this unforgiveness and bitterness go. That's how powerful these things are because what you're doing is you're releasing what's holding you. And we have this concept of if I forgive, that means I'm wrong and they were right and I lose.

That could be farther from the truth. Is that what happened to Jesus? When God forgave us, did he lose? Poor God. He had to apologize.

No, he's giving. He's releasing of a debt that's owed. That's what forgiveness is.

You owe me this debt. The wages of sin is death. Condemnation and wrath of God.

That's what it is. But then God says I forgive you through my son. That debt has been released.

So actually I was wrong. I was in the wrong but God released the debt. So it's very important to live in the word of God.

I've never seen, maybe you have. I'm sure I'll get an email on this one. But I've never seen, I shared this last week, two couples who are in the word of God, who are filled with the spirit of God, worshipping and praying and seeking his will and looking at his Bible who are going to divorce court.

Never, ever seen it. I don't think I've even seen it close. Now are there marriage problems? Yes, come on.

Are there difficulties? Yeah. Is there time for separation from time to time? Sure. But I've never seen two people wanting to please God, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, looking to his word for direction

and obeying it, because everybody can quote it.

Everybody can quote the Bible and the church, many scriptures. But the application of it, when they're applying it, when they're loving God, it never, ever leads to divorce. It can't, why? Because they're filled with the spirit of God.

See the spirit of God is not divided. It's united. It's the flesh that gets in there and goes that direction.

I don't know if I should say this, but I will. There was one couple, they're just, I'm filled with the spirit, this and that. I don't know what you're filled with, but it's not the spirit.

Because they think they are. They think they're, just because they go to church and they've been a Christian, they're filled with the spirit. And I said, you're not filled with the spirit.

How can you say that? Because there's not love and joy and peace and contentment and, uh-oh, gentleness, kindness, long-suffering, forgiveness. There's none of the fruit. You have no fruit of the spirit.

You have fruit of the flesh and you're gonna sit and tell me you're filled with the spirit. You're not. So we have to be careful in this area because we think the spirit's leading me.

Oh, the spirit's leading me to do this. The spirit's leading me to do that. And we rush things.

I was pondering this verse this week. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. You know what's interesting is I realize we will be satisfied.

People who aren't satisfied, they're not hungering and thirsting for righteousness for what is right. Those who hunger and thirst for God's will, those who hunger, and this can apply to our marriages. Like when I was going through the most difficult season in my life, how did I have the most joy I've ever felt before? Because I was hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

Lord, I'm sad at what I did because I take responsibility. As a husband, I created this terrible environment. I was not mean.

I mean, I was not nice. I was mean and liked to drink a lot of beer. I liked to make a lot of money.

Like a prodigal son. And then God finally changed my heart. And then once he changed my heart, when I started to hunger and thirst for righteousness, I was satisfied.

And it reminded me, it all depends on where we direct our hunger. This verse has everything to do with where do you direct your hunger? Where do you direct your appetite? Where do you direct your heart? Are you truly hungry and thirsty? And I'll ask a spouse that. Do you truly want reconciliation and restoration? Do you know what most of them will say? No, I don't.

Why? Because they're talking to Sally at work who recommends taking for all he's got. Because when you hunger and thirst for righteousness, when you hunger and thirst for God's will, God's word, obedience to it, you will be satisfied. It will satisfy you.

And God can deliver those broken by a failed marriage. But in order for change to occur on the outside, it must occur on the inside. Strongholds such as bitterness, pride, lust, selfishness, substance abuse, toxic relationships, anger, physical abuse, to name only a few, they must be eradicated.

God heals us. Here's the key. If you're dealing with depression, anxiety, I know I'm gonna make a controversial statement here, but God heals us primarily with the transforming power of his word and obedience to it and repentance through a broken heart.

That's how God primarily heals us, through his word. So many people are outside of God's will and they're dealing with this issue of depression, anxiety, confusion. I don't know what God's doing to my marriage.

And when you go back to obedience to the word of God and they don't want to do it. You say, I can't help you then. You want me to prescribe Oxycontin for a month? I mean, what do you want? I mean, this is the prescription.

This is what takes the place. And this is how God, I truly believe this is how God heals and restores and rebuilds. Why? Because the battle's here.

Strongholds. You've got fortresses in the mind. They've got to be broken down.

You've got to be rebuilt. How are they rebuilt? Through the transforming power of God's word. Listen, I know.

If I'm on Facebook long enough, I will believe that Iran is going to nuke us next week. The government's going to take all of our guns. I'm not going to be able to buy any ammunition next week.

And then China is going to call in their \$3 trillion deficit we owe them. And the American dollar is going to plummet to nothing. And I'm going to be living out in the street defending my family with AR-15.

You know that's true. Because everybody's so busy posting and worrying, and that's what's creating. Actually, I believe that much of the chaos that we're feeling is self-inflicted.

Do we not remember that God's going to bring nations against Israel? God is. And we're like, oh, what's going to happen? God is. God's protecting them.

God says, let the nations know that they are but men. I raise one king up and I'll pull another king down. If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked way, I will heal their land.

That should be our focus. That should be our focus. So how does it transform us? Right? That's how powerful this is.

I see myself slipping too. Uh-oh. You know, here they come.

Should I buy some more 9mm before they're out? Should I get a carry permit right here? I mean, it's getting bad. I don't know if you follow the news much, but I can't follow it much anymore. There's another school shooting.

You know? School shootings are happening all the time. All the time. The funny connection is they never tell you how many of those guys were addicted to violent video games and how many of them were on very heavy doses of depression medication.

Bad combination. Why? As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. So this transforms the mind.

This is the answer. This is the hope. Getting back into God's Word, letting it transform our mind.

I would encourage you, take a Fastbook phase for a month. Actually, you can shut off for two weeks without deleting all your stuff. You will go through withdrawals.

I'll tell you right now. It's not pretty. What's my... What's the disconnect? You will, but it's very healthy because we've got to work.

This is a battle. If you don't do anything, you will digress away from God. Shane, come on.

No, I won't. I've been a Christian 30 years. If you do nothing, you will digress away from God.

It's a battle. You've got to hold the ground as a good soldier fighting a good fight of faith, removing every weight and sin that so easily ensnares us, pressing forward. It's a pushing.

Every day, I've got to force myself to get into the Word of God, to get into worship because it's a battle. That's where victory is going to be won or lost. Do you know how much Psalm 23 means to me now? Or Psalm 51, when David, create me a clean heart, renew a right spirit within me, Lord, renew the joy of my salvation.

Now the Scriptures come alive. Now they mean the world to me. Why? Because I experienced them.

Because God healed me through the transforming power of His Word. It healed me. And that's why even with depression, anxiety, all these things, that God's primary mechanism for changing us is through His Word because this is the heart of God.

This is the counsel of God. I think somewhere it says, and He healed them through His Word. Right? I wrote it down here.

I'll come across it. He sent His Word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction. And that's why it's so frustrating is that's the answer and so few look to it.

Over the last year, the majority of the marriages that were in turmoil, ended in divorce, nobody looked to that. Well, they might read a quick little, well, let me read a proverb to you. That was nice.

But they didn't really look to God's Word for direction. Because when you look to it, He will answer you. And on this point, I vividly remember, I think I shared this last year, my wife encouraging a young mom not to leave her husband and small children.

It was right when we started this church. And it still shocks me to even think about it. Her response was shocking.

She said, I know what the Bible says, but God wants me to be happy. He knows my heart. And as far as I know, years now, they're still divorced.

The kids are a little older. The kids are in a lot of pain. But the mom said, she had the audacity to say, I know what God's Word says.

As if they're separate. But God wants me to be happy. He knows my heart.

Can we say hogwash? That's foolishness. That's somebody who is probably not a believer, in my opinion. Or at risk of apostasy.

Because you cannot say that. Ephesians 4, this is what I alluded to earlier, says to let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you. It's interesting.

Some of these scriptures, God does it. Some of these scriptures, we have to do it. We have to put these things away from us.

They're clinging on. We have to put them away. Be kind to one another.

Tender hearted. Forgiving one another. Even as God and Christ forgave you.

Here's where the majority of the problems are. God says, would you go be kind to one another. Tender hearted.

Maybe pay the bills. Take out the trash as you're separated. How can I help you? How can I love you? How can I forgive you? They don't want to do that.

They're in a war zone. They forget the battle's not the spouse. The battle's the enemy.

And this would fix so many problems. Tender hearted. Forgiving one another.

Even as God and Christ forgave you. If you are separated or recently divorced and are lacking peace and joy, I encourage you to rethink your current situation. Confusion, anxiety, fear, and some forms of depression are sometimes indicators that we're outside of God's will.

Notice how I put the word sometimes in there, right? Without that I'll get emails. I've done everything right and I'm still dealing with depression. Yes, of course.

I know that. I mean, it happens. I'm not saying all the time, but you can't tell me that the majority of the confusion and anxiety and depression and the hell inside of many marriages is not because people are outside of God's will.

It is. The husband's chasing the almighty dollar. He wants toys in the garage and the wife's doing this and she wants all this stuff and she likes to go to Macy's and she wants to buy all this stuff.

And they just send their kids to school and let the government raise them and just, what's going on here? It's because of this reason. Because we're outside of God's will. A personal favorite of mine is 1 Corinthians 7, 17.

It states that we must accept whatever situation the Lord has put us in. And continue on is when God first called us. If single, use that opportunity to build and strengthen your character and care for the things of God.

Let God bring the spouse. This is interesting. I mainly tell men this.

You don't say I do and then become a man of character. If you're addicted to porn going into your marriage, guess what's gonna happen? They'll think, won't this just go away, Shane? No, it multiplies. Because the enemy has fertile ground to work in.

If you're very angry now and aggressive and abusive and she just excuses it, I'll change him. No, you won't. See, the man goes into, the woman goes into their marriage thinking, I'll change him.

The man goes into the marriage thinking, I hope she never changes. And neither happened. She changes. And he doesn't. So that's why it's singles. Because this will go out to a lot of different people.

If you're single, use this opportunity to build godly character now. See, you should be the man or woman of God now. The Proverbs 31 woman, you don't become that 20 years after you're married.

You should be the Proverbs 31 woman now. And the man should be the godly man following after God who has accountability on his phone for pornography and things like that, who's doing seeking God now. So when they go into marriage, it's a healthy foundation.

And some of you might be saying, boy Shane, you should bring up pornography a lot. Yeah, I do, because it's an epidemic. It's everywhere.

It's one click away. One click away. Who's got that much willpower? We need accountability.

We need God to come in and clean the heart out and to work in this area. Understand, too, understand it's adultery. It's adultery if you're married.

If not, it's called fornication. It all falls under pornea. Yeah, pornea, the same word, feminine, masculine.

It still falls under that category. So it is a big deal. It will influence.

It will cloud your vision to follow God's lead. But if you're separated, use that time to seek God more fervently and pray for guidance, direction, and restoration. If you're a person separated, use that time.

I just called a girl I knew. She divorced. She separated from her husband.

We knew them from another church. I finally got her on the line. I said, this is what you gotta do.

You gotta seek God with all your heart. Next week, I see posts on Facebook. They're in Vegas.

Beer bongs by the pool. You don't know what that is. It's okay.

I'm like, what in the world do people think? If you're separated, that's the time you use to draw closer to God because if you don't, she just opened the door to the enemy. Guess what? Is there any hope for restoration? Not now. He's met a godly woman.

He's moved on. She's still dating her drinking buddy. This is serious stuff.

This is families falling apart. What do the kids think of that? Can you imagine explaining? But if you're divorced, use that experience to learn while asking God what good can come from it. One of God's wonderful characteristics is that he desires to use our brokenness.

In fact, it's in our weakness that his strength is manifested. I've never quite understood that verse until I went through this. That his strength is seen in our weakness.

As soon as I say, Lord, I'm weak in this area. Lord, I've blown it here. I'm repenting.

Through that weakness, his strength comes out. But when we think we're strong, we got this dialed in. Take heed, lest ye fall.

That's where his strength is seen, in our weakness. And I love to see men that are broken and humble before God. They'll say, oh, they're just being a doormat.

They're a pushover. No, they're not. That's a real man who can serve Christ, love one woman, and raise his children to fear and admonition.

Lord, that's a real man because it's difficult. It's challenging. Be assured that all things work together for good as we commit our lives to him.

I need to remind you of Romans at this stage. Everybody's all down and sad, but remember, God works all things. I don't know how, but he works all things for good for those who love him and for those who are called according to his purpose.

Spend some time in Romans tonight. Start in chapter 12 and just read it. Presenting your body as a living sacrifice, holy was our reasonable service, being not conformed to this world, but being transformed by the power of the word of God and laying down our lives and allowing him to shape us.

And then he'll take what the enemy intended for evil, he'll make for good. I never in my wildest dreams, 1998, 1999, I never would have said what I'm about to say to you. I thank God for my divorce.

He didn't cause it, he allowed it and that brought me home. I'd probably be dead, buried in Lancaster had he not done that. He took the worst thing I've ever went through and experienced.

He took it. He said, now you've got a right heart. Now I can bless it.

Now watch it when I work together for good. You think I'd trade in my wife and four kids and go back? Never, ever. I couldn't even imagine.

But that's God. So that's the encouraging thing. If we're going, oh Lord, I'm in trouble here.

Shane's really bringing it. I'm convicted. Well good, you just get back to him.

You don't allow your past mistakes to cause future pain. Paul said, the one thing I do, one thing I do, I forget those things that lie behind and I press forward to the mark which is Christ Jesus. In God, pressing forward, moving forward.

That's what he wants us to do. Learn from the past, repent, get back on track and now God, you direct me. And I'll share that story I shared last year as well about the shepherds who I used to read a book on shepherding back when I had more time.

And it talked about, I mean, I validate it but I'm not sure if it's true. I think it is. I've talked to some people.

But a shepherd would actually break the leg of a lamb that would wander continually from the flock. He would break the leg and then he would carry that lamb on his shoulder for weeks until that leg was healed. And then through that broken independent relationship, that lamb learned to never wander from the shepherd again.

And we see that same imagery, don't we, for us. So it begs the question, what will it take to bring you back to the shepherd? What will it take to bring you back to the shepherd? Because if you're broken, he can do his greatest work. If you're not, he won't be able to direct you.

He won't be able to mend the relationship. So I would encourage you, I would encourage you to look again to the shepherd in all these areas and rely on that broken, see it's through that broken independent relationship of carrying that shepherd, he learned to trust the shepherd. His leg was rebuilt and restored.

And through that brokenness, he became whole and complete. And he'll do the same for us.

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