

Surviving a Troubled Marriage

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Most couples enter marriage with the intention of making it a permanent commitment, but sometimes life interferes. Perhaps the partners were immature and mistook infatuation for lasting love. Perhaps one partner was unfaithful, or an addiction poisoned love. There are many reasons for discord, but the result may be the same—love seems to be dying and it's painful. How do people survive this? It's not easy, but it's not hopeless.

For

Adult, Couple

Season

Winter

Needed

Paper, pencil, willingness to look deeply into oneself

Prepare in Advance

If you are still married and seeking to revive your marriage, invite your spouse (even if you're separated) to work through Activity A with you. If you are divorced, focus on Activity B.

Activity A

1. **Begin with prayer.** Pause to remember that you are in the presence of God:

Loving God, you created human beings out of your love, and we strive to be part of your loving energy. We remember that Jesus said, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9). But these are hard words for us. We fear our love has weakened; we no longer feel strong love for one another. Help us to see your will for each of us and for our marriage. Amen.

2. **Whose fault is it?** In any marriage in trouble, there are two sides. Even if one partner seems to be the obvious offender—such as in the case of adultery or addiction—the other partner needs to honestly look at what he or she has contributed to problems in the marriage. Perhaps one spouse was too meek and passive or tried too hard to please. Perhaps one spouse was more devoted to the children, a career, or a hobby than to time together as a couple.

Take a moment for each partner to write a list of what he or she has contributed to the breakdown of the marriage. Exchange lists and read them silently. Use "I" statements—I feel overwhelmed, I don't understand why you said this—as you discuss the lists briefly.

3. **Do we want to try to save our marriage?** First of all, if there is danger of physical abuse, safety trumps working on the marriage. The abuser must prove he or she is capable of controlling anger before work on the marriage can begin.



Regardless of feelings of guilt, it takes a commitment from both partners to try to restore a working marriage. If both partners are willing to try, that's the first step. However, if the problems in your marriage are bad enough that you've chosen this Vibrant Faith activity, outside help also is probably necessary. Following are some actions to consider:

- a. **Marriage counseling.** Perhaps you have already tried this. Sometimes successful, marriage counseling is a matter of finding the right match between the couple and the counselor. Were you both happy with the counselor you chose? If there is resistance to making an appointment for counseling, what's stopping you? Ask a trusted pastor to recommend possible counselors.
 - b. **[The Third Option](#).** This is a 16-week small group program for couples in troubled marriages. The sessions are led by couples who have been there. One partner can go without the other. You can join the group at any time.
 - c. **[Retrouvaille](#).** This is a residential weekend program to help couples improve their communication skills, heal, and renew their marriages (*retrouvaille* is French for "rediscovery"). It is led by couples who have faced difficulties themselves.
4. **If you don't have a joint commitment** to work on the marriage, proceed to Activity B on your own.

Activity B

1. **Begin with prayer.** Be still for a moment and remember that God is with you and loves you, no matter what.

Jesus, you knew the best of times and the worst of times. So have I. Right now I'm feeling all alone. There may be a part of me that feels relief, but it is still horribly painful. Be with me during these difficult times. Help me to believe that there are better days ahead and that I will heal. Uphold me with your eternal love. Amen.

2. **Get some personal support.** You need a few friends who will stand by you. You might feel overwhelmed with parenting, work, or household tasks and think you have little time for the luxury of friends; however, you need to take some time to do things that refresh your spirit (hobbies, exercise, games). Do some of these things with friends.
3. **Get some insight.** You may think the end of your marriage was completely your ex's fault or completely your fault. Neither is true. It can be hard to sort these things out. Books, good friends, and self-reflection can help; but for most people professional help is worth the money.
4. **Slowly let go of anger and grief.** Don't expect to feel better quickly. A part of you has died—you had become one flesh with your ex. Gradually, as you substitute positive activities and thoughts for anger and grief, your suffering will fade. Believe that you are lovable and will be able to love again in some form, some day.
5. **Do the Vibrant Faith @ Home activity [Life without a Partner](#).**

