

Divorce Will I Get Through This?

Heather and Pete were married for 16 years when he announced that he no longer loved her and that he wanted to separate. She was stunned as she watched him pack his bags and leave. She hoped and prayed, but soon she was served with divorce papers.

Her heart was broken and she felt confused and angry. She worried about their two children, and she had many fears about how she would survive financially. Even the smallest decision seemed to be overwhelming.

Divorce is a difficult thing, especially for the spouse who does not want it. The feelings are very often confusing (“How can I love him and hate him at the same time?”) and one can often have the sense of “not knowing what to do next.”

If you are reading this, the chances are that you are experiencing a separation or divorce. The purpose of this pamphlet is to help you understand the different stages of going through a divorce and to give you some practical suggestions.

The process of divorce is very much like the process of grieving, because this is a loss. Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’s model of grieving has five stages:

Denial - “This can’t be happening.” “He didn’t really mean that he wants a divorce.” “He’ll come back to me someday.”

Anger – “I am mad at the person or the circumstance.” “I hope she gets punished for hurting me.”

Bargaining – “If only I had gone golfing with him, he wouldn’t have left.” “I will be a much better wife if I get another chance.” “I can make her happy if she’d only give me the chance.”

Depression – “I’ll never be happy again.” “Life isn’t worth living without her.” “I am unlovable.”

Acceptance – “It is what it is. I can’t change it. I can be happy again.”

The process of divorce is a very similar journey. There are feelings along the way that most people experience that can feel confusing and overwhelming. A counselor or good friend can help you to identify and understand your feelings and help you grow from this difficult experience.

One of the things you will feel along the way, especially in those first weeks or months is a feeling of being in a storm. Your storm will consist of decisions to be made that you don’t feel ready to make, issues with children, many waves of emotions, possible changes in lifestyle, and on and on. It may literally feel like the “rug has been pulled out from under you” and you have no firm footing.

It is very important to recognize that these things are all very normal, and that in the midst of the storm God has promised that He will always be with you, even in the storm (Deuteronomy 31:8). During this time you may feel embarrassment, fear, loneliness, anger, and rejection.

Along the way, you will learn to heal. In order to heal, you will need to learn to change the way you think. Change those negative thoughts into ones that line up with God’s word. You will come to understand that the divorce is not *all* your fault. You’ll quit blaming yourself.

This is a time when God can wrap His arms around you and love you. At the same time He will call you to examine your own sin and learn to forgive. This will require you giving up your right to be angry and seek revenge. You need to forgive in order to heal and move on.

Somewhere along the way you will notice that you are doing better. You’ll find that the “good days” become more and more frequent, and eventually you are having “good weeks.” Then you will begin to experience new joy and hope that is a sign of healing, much like the beautiful spring flowers mark the onset of a new season.

The divorce will probably never be a cause to celebrate, because the death of a marriage is difficult. But the Bible tells us that “weeping only lasts for a night” but “joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

The process is not easy, and it certainly isn't pleasant, but you can come through to the other side of it and you can experience joy and peace. You may have a new understanding of God's care for you, knowing that He both knows about and cares about your circumstances. You may grow in ways you never thought possible, and you may delight in your weakness, because when you find that in weakness, you are made strong through Christ (II Corinthians 12:10).

In the stages of grief you move in and out of the stages, not always moving in a forward pattern. You will move through the stages of divorce in the same way. You may feel anger, then hope, then anger and then feel and experience God's love. You may then feel sad again. You may literally be “all over the map” when it comes to your feelings. That is normal.

Surround yourself with people who love and care for you. Make sure that you care for yourself—body, soul, and spirit. Fill your mind up with the truth of God's word, and know that the darkness you feel will be followed by the dawn of hope and new life.