

FAMILYLIFE®

A person is reading a book, with a potted plant and a cup of coffee visible in the background. The scene is dimly lit, creating a calm and focused atmosphere.

***Fighting  
For Your  
Friend's  
Marriage***



## ***When Your Friend's Marriage Shows Signs of Divorce:*** **7 Non-Pushy Ways to Help**

By Janel Breitenstein

Maybe you've been there: On the phone call, where the voice on the other end is hitching with tears. Or over lunch or coffee, where your friend's eyes look distant, bewildered, and wounded as they explain a marriage that's falling apart. It's distressing when the warning signs of divorce are evident in your friend's marriage.

Chances are, by the time couples have gotten to this point, your friend has already flirted with the idea of splitting up. They could have one foot on a banana peel, sliding out the door.

What can you do to help?

### **What to do when you see signs of divorce**

We say these ideas are non-pushy. But let us encourage you to care enough to be just a little intrusive. Popular culture may tell you to keep your nose out of it. But pray about what it looks like to be your brother's keeper—to be the Samaritan who sees a person robbed and bleeding and carries them out of harm's way.

Here are a few ideas to fight for your friends.

## 1. Be there.

Walking with friends whose marriage shows signs of divorce often seems to take time we don't have. But compared to some of the other less-consequential items consuming our schedules, it's a tremendous return on investment to create the time to help friends save what matters. To love them well.

Intentionally wrap your head around just being there for these people God placed in your path. Ask Him for the wisdom and love to remain fully present and engaged, even if helping doesn't end in success. Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and activist, wrote wisely,

*Do not depend on the hope of results ... you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect ... All the good that you will do will come, not from you but from the fact that you have allowed yourself, in the obedience of faith, to be used by God's love.*



## 2. Tend to systemic issues—more than slapping on bandages.

Though romance unquestionably keeps a marriage in the more “satisfied” zone, expecting to renovate years of damage with a single weekend or a date, though helpful, may not be realistic. Ask questions of both parties to uncover not just the presenting issues (the lack of sex, the financial issues) but the pain and communicated values beneath them (we're not attracted to each other; my spouse has no self-control or respect for the systems that help our family thrive).

Maintain a bigger picture about what it takes to keep a relationship together. Sometimes a parched marriage just needs a drink of water. But other times, it needs to get to a hospital to treat dehydration and the issues that caused it.

### 3. Inspire rather than goad.

In general, people are far more motivated to create change for problems and solutions they've come to themselves rather than solutions thrust upon them. Muscling through may work for a while, but those slogging through signs of divorce are fatigued and often ready to quit straining and hurting.

Listen well. Ask lots and lots of wise questions to truly understand. Then gently (!) remind them of truth. Help them remember why they married in the first place and to sort out cultural norms (“I deserve to be happy!”) from truth (“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” [1 John 3:16 NIV]).

### 4. Help carry your friend's load.

Examine how you could share the weight: “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1-2).

Is mommy-fatigue killing the marriage?  
Maybe offer a date night.

Is an addiction involved? Brainstorm counseling, accountability, and/or rehab options. Offer to help watch the kids or to help hold the spouse accountable.



### 5. Resist the urge to take sides.

No matter the signs of divorce you see, there are two sides to the story—two profound needs. And one of the overarching themes of the gospel that saves each one of us is this: “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless ...” (1 Peter 3:9).

Why? Because it's what Jesus did for us. We were His enemies. He brought us close—at the cost of His own life.

Both parties in any marriage need forgiveness, need the gospel. Yes, one may be more responsible for certain issues than the other. But in the end, casting one party as the villain, adding to the drama and sense of entitlement, does not help the other spouse go home and stay married.

Help the spouse you're working with take 100% responsibility for the log in his or her own eye (see Matthew 7:3-5)—even if you both believe your friend's contribution was only 10% of the problem. It is not your responsibility to make someone pay, but rather for yourself and your friend to love as Jesus did.

## 6. Pray for your friend and their marriage.

We're talking more than a laundry list of prayer requests mentally checked off. Though God has given us much power to affect change, much of life also falls squarely into the "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6) category.

In *We Shall have Spring Again*, Andrée Seu Peterson writes, "I am keeping two separate piles from now on, based on Deuteronomy 29:29: the things I can do something about, and the things I can't; those that belong to me, and those that belong to God. Responsibility; sovereignty."

She's referring to this verse: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

As we help our friends pursue God's tender principles for marriage, we also commit to God all the battles that are His. We listen to His heart for them and allow His Spirit to "intercede"—to intervene on behalf of—"us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

## 7. Know your limits.

You might find it surprising that the Good Samaritan had boundaries: He eventually left for his own trip. He delegated care of the robbed man to an innkeeper and gave the latter a budget.

Love your friend extravagantly and sacrificially when you see signs of divorce. But it's also okay, with your friend's permission, to seek help elsewhere as you help others.

It's a pretty sure bet you won't have all the answers. And there's a decent chance you'll feel overwhelmed at points, depending on how deep you go with your friends. Galatians 6 reminds us "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."

You might not be tempted in the same ways as those you're helping. But despair? Thinking you have the answers or see things clearly? Gossip?

Peacemaker Ministries differentiates that gossip is sharing with people who aren't part of the solution. So bring your spouse into things for help. Seek wise counselors with tight lips—best case scenario, after asking your friend. And prayerfully ask God to show you what you don't know and can't do, as well as where to find help.

He created the body of Christ for beautiful reasons: both within marriage, and outside of it.

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## **20 Easy, Promise-You-Can-Do-This Ways to Help Other Marriages Thrive**

- 1.** Set up a reminder to pray for them on your phone. Ask your friend for specific prayer requests.
- 2.** Have them over for dinner.
- 3.** Go on a double date, doing something where it's hard not to laugh, like bowling or mini golf. Sometimes couples just need some positive memories in the bank.
- 4.** As you discover a tender spot—finances, little kids, an unbelieving spouse—pray about what ways you could practically help.
- 5.** Give them a certificate to a FamilyLife Weekend to Remember®.
- 6.** Create time and space to listen.
- 7.** Meet with the same-gender spouse, so you can listen and care for them individually.
- 8.** Gently help your friend see his or her spouse's perspective.

9. Care for an overwhelmed spouse: a gift certificate to a pottery class, childcare while they catch a weekend away, a gift certificate for a mid-week coffee break.
10. Make dinner for them.
11. Tenderly help your friend see how they might be contributing to the problem.
12. Offer to watch their kids for a date night.
13. When it fits, invite them to a church event (MOPS, a fall festival, parents' night out, etc.) to help open future conversations to faith.
14. Talk about ways you're intentionally working through your own marital issues, without divorce as an option (and without spouse-bashing).
15. Connect them to a solid mentor couple.
16. In conversation, mention things you appreciate about your friends' relationship.
17. Encourage them to take a weekend away.
18. Slip an encouraging card in the mail to the spouse you've been talking to, reminding them you're praying for them.
19. Affirm to your friend the beautiful opportunity to love a spouse as God has loved us. God loved us—chose our lives in place of His own. He set aside His rights, status, all the love and honor He deserved, and wrapped himself in every reality of serving us ... to the point of death.
20. Send a gift card, encouraging your friends to use it for a date night.



# Share With Her:

## 15 Things Wives Should Stop Doing

By Mary May Larmoyeux

In the 1960s, The Supremes recorded their hit song “Stop! In the Name of Love!” I remember singing the words as a teenager: “Before you break my heart ... think it o-o-ver ...”

Even though I’ve been married for decades now, it’s still important for me to consider my husband’s needs. I should think about the possible effects of my careless words, attitudes, and actions before I break his heart. Can you identify?

I asked some girlfriends, “What should a wife stop doing if she wants to improve her marriage?” This list is based on their responses.

### 1. Stop thinking your way is the “right” way.

If he does something differently, it doesn’t mean it’s wrong. When a wife insists on having her own way, she is in essence saying, “I have to be in control.”

### 2. Don’t put others before your husband.

God designed companionship in marriage so that a husband and wife can meet one another’s need for a close, intimate, human relationship. He even said in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good that the man should be alone.”

So what happens when you put your mother, a friend, or even a child before your spouse? You take a step (often unintentional) toward isolation in your marriage. If you choose, for example, to spend an afternoon shopping with your mom when your husband asked you to watch a football game with him, you may leave hubby feeling he has second place in your heart.

### 3. Don’t expect your husband to be your girlfriend.

Most men and women not only look different physically, but also have unique

ways of processing life. One example of this is the need for conversation. I don't know about you, but sometimes I'm guilty of wearing out my husband with countless conversational details that he doesn't really care about. Now if he were a girlfriend, all those details would matter!

#### **4. Don't dishonor your husband.**

Suggestions included: Stop all nagging and don't correct hubby in front of others. If you finish your husband's sentences, you may be unintentionally communicating, "I don't really care about what you have to say."

#### **5. Stop expecting your husband to fail you as your dad failed your mom.**

"I spent many years waiting for my husband to give up and walk out on me, like my dad had years earlier," said one friend. Her unfounded fears robbed her marriage of much joy.

#### **6. Don't put your husband on the defensive.**

For example, if you are driving around a section of town looking for a restaurant and he's obviously lost, does it really help for you to tell him that he's been going around the same block for the fifth time? One wise wife said she's learned to be quiet in situations like this. Now, before she makes a comment, she weighs her words—asking herself: "Are my words needed? Would they be encouraging?"

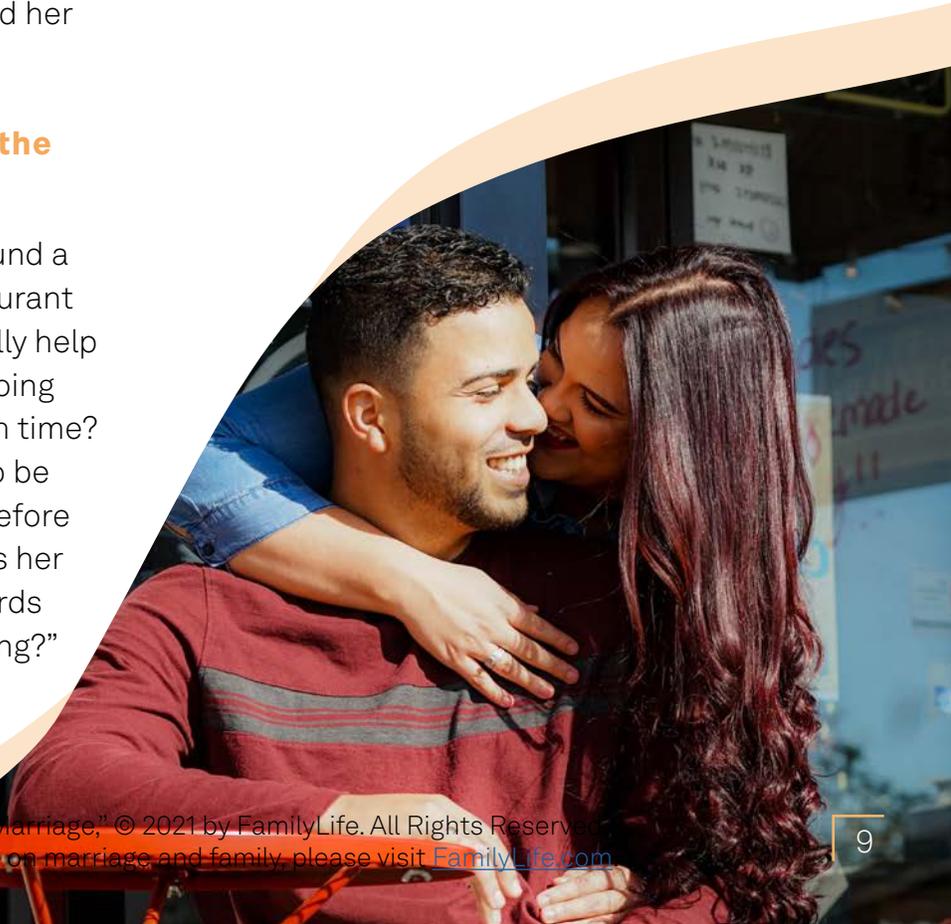
Proverbs 10:19 says, "When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent."

#### **7. Never use sex to bargain with your husband.**

Some women intentionally or unintentionally say to their husbands, "When I get what I want, you get sex." However, 1 Corinthians 7:4-5 reminds husbands and wives that their bodies are not their own. "Do not deprive one another ..."

#### **8. Stop reminding your husband about things over and over.**

Don't make him feel guilty or nitpick him about small stuff. One friend said that when we constantly remind our husbands about diet, weight, medication, picking up the dry cleaning, etc., we are acting more like his mother than his wife.





### **9. Don't make your husband earn your respect.**

Many women think, I'll respect him when he earns it. But there's a reason Ephesians 5:33 says, "Let the wife see that she respects her husband."

As one friend said: "If women could learn to understand that respect is a man's native tongue, that it absolutely heals his heart and ministers to him like nothing else, it would make the biggest difference in the world."

### **10. Stop giving your husband your long-term to-do list.**

A colleague warned against overwhelming your husband with too much information. You may unintentionally cause him to feel like a failure, thinking that your long list means you are discontent.

### **11. Don't act like your spouse is a mind reader.**

Instead, be specific about your requests. One busy mom said that she used to feel overwhelmed with household chores, wishing her spouse would help her. She now realizes that the only way he knows her needs is when she tells him.

"Most often," she says, "when I simply say, 'Honey, will you tuck the kids in tonight while I get the kitchen cleaned up,' he is glad to help." She's discovered that a few words are all it takes "to change a resentment-filled, stressed-out night into a team-effort bonding time."

### **12. Stop putting housework ahead of hubby.**

One young mom told her husband that she didn't want to make love one night because she had just changed the sheets and she wanted them to stay clean. What do you think that response said to her husband?

### **13. Put an end to taking the lead because you think he won't.**

"The first many years of our marriage," one wife said, "I would see what needed to be done and get frustrated that my husband would not take charge and get it done." She went on to say that she's changed by learning to wait on her husband's leadership. "I really believe," she says, "that our men don't lead because we women are too quick to jump in and take care of it all."

Ephesians 5:23 says, "For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body ...."



#### **14. Do not expect your husband to be Prince Charming.**

After all, the perfect husband only exists in fairy tales and your marriage exists in real life. One young wife said that instead of focusing on her husband's shortcomings, she's learned to recognize the wonderful things about him. What's been the result? He's been encouraged to do even more to be the man of her dreams.

#### **15. Never look first to a self-help book, a plan, or a person to fix a problem in your marriage.**

Instead go to God's Word and believe and act on the things He says. "He will lead me to any resources I need," one woman said. "God has already given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) but we have to live according to the promises and expect Him to show up for us."

The Bible paraphrase The Message, says in 1 Corinthians 13, "Love never gives up ... isn't always 'me first,' ... doesn't keep score of the sins of others ... trusts God always, always looks for the best."

What do your words and actions say to your sweetheart about your love? Do you need to stop doing something in your marriage?

Before you answer, think it o-o-ver.



# Share With Him:

## 15 Things Husbands Should Stop Doing

By Dave Boehi

As husbands, sometimes we need encouragement in our quest to step up and be the men God has called us to be. Sometimes we need information, and sometimes we need training. Sometimes we need a mentor—someone who will show us how to be godly men, how to love our wives as Christ loves the church.

And sometimes we need to know what we should stop doing. Sometimes we may even need someone to say, “Hey, stop acting like a jerk!”

That’s what this list is about.

Of course, not all these items apply to all men. But perhaps something here will hit home for you.

### **1. Stop acting like the battle is won in pursuing and getting to know**

**your wife.** Have fun together, just like you used to do before your wedding.

### **2. Stop coming home from work and plopping in front of the television**

**for the night,** leaving your wife to bear the responsibility for everything else going on in the home.

**3. Stop working so much.** Find a healthy balance between work and family.

**4. Stop allowing the spiritual leadership** of the family to default to your wife.

**5. Stop being passive** when it comes to disciplining and training your kids.

**6. Stop being a closed book.** Open up to your wife. Don’t be afraid to show emotion.

**7. Don’t shy away** from difficult conversations with your wife.

**8. Stop saying you’ll do something** and then procrastinating.

**9. Don't purchase any major item** without first discussing it with your wife.

**10. Don't allow your eyes to linger on beautiful women who pass by.**

You can't help the first look; it's that second, longer look that you need to avoid. And if your wife is with you, don't lie to her and say you didn't see that woman. Just admit you looked.)

**11. Don't assume you know what your wife is thinking.** Ask her how she is feeling and why.

**12. When your wife tells you about a problem she's having,** don't immediately try to solve it. She may just need you to listen to her.

**13. Don't look up old girlfriends** on social media.

**14. Don't allow guy-only activities** (like playing golf, basketball, etc.) to rob you of leisure time with your wife and kids.

**15. Stop expecting your wife** to do all the housework.

Some will say that lists like these are “too negative”—that this is an example of “trashing” men. But these items were sent to me by other men, not by wives.

Here's how I see it: If you are coaching your son's Little League team, you're going to teach him a lot of positives—how to hit, how to throw, what base he should throw to when there are runners on first and second. But you also will need to get him to stop doing things—like swinging at bad pitches or jogging to first base instead of sprinting.

Sometimes we need to know what not to do.



# Helping Your Friends Find a Christian Counselor

As you continue to fight for your friend's marriage, understand that just making the decision on whether to seek counseling for marriage and family issues is difficult. (And it must be the couple's decision!) Once they've decided, the next difficulty is finding a qualified counselor who can help.

We believe it is strength, not weakness, to acknowledge the need for help. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."

If your friend has expressed the need for help in finding a counselor, the following can help them on their journey.

## Look for someone who:

- can provide evidence of solid biblical and counseling training and experience;
- loves people, perseveres through tough times, and is confident that Jesus works in His people;
- believes that the Bible, God's Word, is sufficient for providing wisdom and direction for dealing with life's issues (2 Peter 1:2-4; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17); and
- gives clear evidence of a personal, passionate relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Steps to take:

1. Ask God for wisdom to make the right decisions as you seek a biblical counselor. God promises to give you wisdom if you ask in faith (James 1:5-8). As you step out in faith, He will direct your steps to the right counselor (see also Psalm 23, Proverbs 16:3 and Philippians 4:6-9).
2. Seek counsel from your church. The Bible teaches that there is wisdom in a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:6). If you belong to a church, it is important to seek the counsel of your pastor (Hebrews 13:17), and other church leaders.

The pastor is the first resource to ask about finding a Christian counselor. God has placed your pastor or elder in the local church to give direction and care for the body of Christ, the members of the local church. Your pastor or elder might be able to offer some biblical direction or resources that can meet your needs or help you with the problem you face. One or more of the elders of your church might also be trained in counseling. At the very least, your pastor needs to know the scope of your problem so that he can pray consistently for you and your family.

You might begin talking to mature or trusted believers as well. They may have already spent time with a Christian counselor. If the counselor was able to minister to your friend, then he or she may be worth your prayerful consideration.

If you do not belong to a church, seek the counsel of godly, Bible-believing Christians.

They may also have recommendations of godly pastors who can help you. And consider this: One reason many people face problems in their families is because they lack the right biblical information, encouragement, and modeling to help them succeed. Being involved in a local church may be one of the most important steps you take toward resolving the issues you face.

## Questions to ask a prospective counselor

It's important to make an informed decision about each counselor you consider. If possible, ask these questions on the phone before any appointment, or discuss them during your first meeting. The kind of counselor you will want—one who is humble and committed to the Scripture—should have no problem helping you in this way.

Then talk to your pastor, elder, or a wise Christian friend about your conversation with the counselor and his or her answers with a view to God's Word. Don't forget to continue to pray for God's wisdom to make the right choice.

### Ask your prospective counselor:

1. What is your approach to understanding people's problems and helping them grow and change through counseling? Please describe this process.
2. What are some books or other resources that you recommend regularly or that have most influenced you in your approach to counseling?
3. Are you a Christian? How does your

faith affect your view and practice of counseling?

4. Do you bring Christian truth into your counseling practice? How? What role does Scripture play?
5. Do you pray with those you counsel?
6. Do you go to church? If so, where, and how long have you been a member?
7. What is your educational and professional background? What role does it play?
8. Are you married? Do you have children? Have you ever been divorced? How does your marriage and family situation affect how you counsel people?

## Remember...

Counseling is an interactive process. It is built, established, and maintained on trust. Open and honest dialogue between a counselor and a counselee is the most important component of building trust. If you cannot establish this foundation of trust early on—if you are not confident that the counselor will be wise, biblical, loving, and faithful in your interaction—you may need to look elsewhere.

On the other hand, if you find a wise counselor who uses God’s Word to help you grow in your Christian walk, in your marriage, and in your family, Scripture says you will be blessed! As Proverbs 3:13 tells us, “How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding.”

## Additional Resources

### For you

 **Listen:** [Marriage Mentoring](#)

 **Read:** [So You Want To Be Marriage Mentors? Start Here](#)

 **Read:** [7 Steps for Starting a Marriage Ministry](#)

 **Read:** [Start a Stepfamily Ministry](#)

 **Join:** [FamilyLife Local—Make a difference right where you are](#)

### For your friend

 **Listen:** [How Anger Can Save a Marriage](#)

 **Read:** [What Marriage Counseling Is ... And Isn't](#)

 **Read:** [Connecting With Your Spouse Through the Busy Parenting Years](#)

 **Read:** [God's Purposes For Marriage](#)

 **Join:** [Find the help & hope your marriage needs](#)