

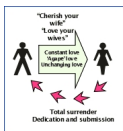
Reconciliation with a Hardened Wife

Written by J. Richard Fugate / Reb Bradley

Friday, 26 March 2010 19:53 - Last Updated Tuesday, 30 March 2010 14:32

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If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18



How are you doing, husband? Is your wife considering separation, or worse, are you already separated? How are you handling it? Are you angry? Were you shocked? Do you feel like you have just awakened from a long sleep, and now find yourself becoming an intensely spiritual man? Would you like to win your wife back and restore your family?

I cannot promise that all who read this article and follow its recommendations will see their family restored, but I do believe that it presents the best biblical recommendations for a man abandoned by his wife. May all who read the following find its eternal benefits.

Husbands, for your information

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When a woman first seriously considers divorce she usually isn't thinking about the theological implications of her desires – all she knows is that she *feels* like she has to get away from her husband. She doesn't arrive at this state of desperation by a process of calm deduction. She is simply reacting to the feeling that she *"can't take anymore."*

Her departure is typically a sign that she has hardened her heart towards the man to whom she once entrusted it. Likely, she has been hurt over and over, and finally decided she will tolerate no more emotional pain. Her leaving may have been an attempt to coerce her husband to change, but more often it has been a desperate effort to *survive*

. She sincerely believes that she cannot endure anymore heartache, so she has reached out and grabbed onto the separation like a drowning swimmer clings to a life ring.

One of the reasons she became so weak, and finally, unwilling to go on, was that whenever she became hurt, she also became angry. As time progressed, the hurts mounted up and the less she felt able to endure. She inadvertently was doing what Christians are warned not to do, and was letting the sun go down on her anger (Eph 4:26), which grew into bitterness, which ultimately defiled her (Heb 12:15). In a final act of self defense, she hardened her heart so that it would no longer be vulnerable to pain. This wall around her heart seemed to give her the courage to emotionally cut herself off from her husband.

Sadly, most husbands have few memories of "hurting" their wives. But let all such men consider – if a woman does something as extreme as leave her mate, claiming she can no longer handle the emotional pain, isn't it likely she is, in fact, in pain? (If emotional feelings could bleed, a man would see a trail of blood following his wife as she walks away from him.) The truth is that a hardened woman only got that way because her feelings got hurt over and over. Herein lies the problem – most women believe that they have communicated their hurt to their husbands, but most husbands only have memories of their wife's bad attitudes. All those times a wife thought she was simply expressing the cry of an injured heart, her husband only perceived hostility, coldness, or hatred. She felt like she was begging for tenderness and sensitivity, and he backed away because he thought he was being attacked. My experience is that *most women leave their husbands, because they entered marriage with expectations of feeling treasured and cherished, and their husbands unwittingly have sent the message that they are not*

. Hence, those women end up bitter and hardened.

(Most Christian wives will not believe it is bitterness they harbor -- they think they merely hold feelings of "hurt".)

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The man who hopes to reconcile with a bitter, hardened wife must first realize that for her to return to him will require that she forgive him. As a believer she is bound by her duty to forgive all offenders and love her enemies, but an abandoned husband should not rely upon her sense of duty to God. She obviously no longer sees her need to obey God or she wouldn't have forsaken her biblical duties as a wife, which is why she feels equally unmotivated to forgive him.

Rather than concentrate on what his wife is doing wrong, it is better that an abandoned husband think about what he must do facilitate the softening of her heart and help her to forgive him.

How a hard heart is softened

What are God's means for softening a woman's hardened heart? In Scripture, God reaches hardened hearts in several different ways:

- > God sovereignly touches her, or does so in response to our prayers

- > A Christian's new nature, if the heart is not too far hardened, will respond to words of Truth, ie: spoken by a friend, a seminar tape, a sermon, a radio preacher, a counselor, etc. (These words are not often received when spoken by the offender.)

- > The hardened wife sees the situation from another perspective, like King David when he was creatively confronted by Nathan the Prophet.

- > Realizing the impact her decision is having, or may have, on her children or others

- > She comes to a place of great spiritual brokenness and humility caused by an overwhelming personal trauma or by the humiliating exposure of a sin

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> Overwhelming love. God loves her through people, ie: her husband, child, friend, parent, etc.

> A time of mutual crisis, ie: compassion for her injured child may temporarily get her outside herself, and cause her to lower her defenses (or she may grow harder, blaming her husband for the crisis)

> She is subjected to church discipline, and the lack of fellowship makes her see the seriousness of her actions. (Not very effective today, because fellowship is easily found at liberal churches in their Divorce Recovery groups.)

> She sees something in her husband which gives her hope, so she lowers her defenses to try again. After opening herself up to her husband, he finds she will listen to him, and he can lead her back to God.

How a man might regain his wife's trust

1. A man must first understand his wife's condition:

She views her husband as one to whom she entrusted her heart and who then was repeatedly rough with it

She has been hurt, so is now overwhelmed with a sense of desperation to emotionally or mentally survive

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She is unforgiving, bitter, and vengeful

Out of self-protection she has hardened her heart both toward her husband and God

Out of self-preservation she has become willful and defiant

Untrusting of God, uncaring what He wants

She has become unconcerned about her biblical duties as a wife

2. A wife who leaves her husband is hardened not just against him, but also against God. A man must therefore pray, pray, pray! He must plead with the Almighty to intervene for the sake of his wife's soul. God is a specialist in hardened hearts, and a hardened believer will not repent without God's softening intervention.

3. A man must stop feeling sorry for himself, like he is a victim of a heartless, witchy wife. He must see himself as perpetrator of hurt – not a victim of rejection. Self pity will pollute a man's prayers, and create an "odor" which his wife smells every time he relates with her.

4. If a man seeks to reconcile he must be able to identify and repent of those things which he

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has contributed to the problems. He must therefore, pray, pray, pray! He will need God to reveal to him those things he did which accidentally sent the message to his wife that she meant little to him.

5. Once a man is confident he has identified his offenses, he should go repent to his wife, or better yet, write a letter of apology and repentance. A man's purpose will not simply be to win back his wife, but to repent and fulfill his role as a follower of Jesus, making amends to one he has hurt.

6. The greatest cause for concern for any man whose wife hardens her heart, must not be that she has hurt him, is alienating the children, or is destroying the marriage. An abandoned husband's greatest cause for concern is the condition of his wife's soul – as Scripture warns, a hardened heart is a trait common to those who are perishing. (Eph 4:18; Heb 3:13, 15; Deut 31:27; 1 Sam 15:23; Acts 7:51; 28:27). A husband must look beyond his own frustration and be concerned that his wife is deceived and hardened toward God. He must be concerned for her, because her steps are walking her away from intimate fellowship with God. Her defiance towards the Scriptures hints that she may walk hardened toward God for the rest of her life, the consequences she will reap, affecting her into eternity. A hardened woman merits her husband's compassion, not his arrogance.

The Wrong Ways to Reconcile

1. Apologize in a self-centered way.

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- > Do not offer explanations as to why you are so blind and why you hurt her. It will only sound to her like you are excusing what you have done.

- > No matter how excited you are, do not share with her new-found revelations you may have discovered about yourself, related to why you do what you do. It will only sound like an excuse.

- > Don't try to make her understand you. She's not interested in why you did what you did.

- > Do not tell her of your present emotional condition

- > She already believes you are self absorbed. Do not talk about yourself and prove her right. (Besides, putting the focus back on yourself is really a sign that you are indeed self absorbed.)

2. Be certain she is aware of her contribution to the problem

- > Blame or discredit her in some fashion.

- > This will put her on the defensive, causing a negative reaction.

- > Apologize that you didn't respond that well to her offenses

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3. Communicate to her that you have not changed

> Repeat familiar unfulfilled promises to change

> Ask forgiveness again for the same old things will only remind her of unfulfilled expectations

4. Express anger or annoyance when you speak with her

> Yes, she is hurting you and the children, so yes, it is natural to be angry, but she believes she is simply reacting to your offenses, so in her eyes, you are the last person qualified to point out her sin

> She believes you owe her, so she will be even more offended when your anger suggests that she owes you

> She will view your attitude as a further expression of the same thing that drove her away.

> Your anger will express a lack of understanding concerning her and the pain you have caused her

(The presence of anger reveals pride in you that has not been dealt with, and the fact that you have not accepted your part in the problem.)

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5. Write a good sounding letter without proper follow up.

> If you write a beautiful letter of repentance, but have no change in your heart, your wife may at first get her hopes up and begin to soften, but when she spots your inconsistency she will become even more angry and possibly harden her heart beyond your reach.

> If you make promises of change, you must be certain to follow through – perfectly!

(If you write a good letter, but lack the love and humility of Christ in your heart, you will express annoyance at her rather than concern. And she will feel it.)

The Right Way to Reconcile

1. Remember that you are trying to reach someone with a hardened and mistrusting heart

> Her condition was caused because she has felt unloved, un-cherished, not cared for, despised, neglected, unimportant, and pushed aside for your self-love and self-interest.

> Your goal must be to contribute to the softening of her heart, which will require you to regain her trust

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2. Die to pride and self concerns.

> You have been proud and selfish now it's time to "take the beam from your own eye."

3. Understand her hurt condition.

> She doesn't want to be right – she wants you to understand the way she feels.

4. Own your failures.

> The things that you did to help cause her hurt condition.

5. Communicate to her that you empathize with her and do not blame her.

> Come along side and comfort her. Look to one of her girlfriends as an example of understanding, ie: A girlfriend would likely look at her, feel her pain, and express compassionate understanding for what she is probably feeling.

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> Feed back to her how she is probably feeling

> Let her know that you understand what it is like to walk in her shoes as one who feels hurt, ie: "Honey, you must feel conned. Before we were married I communicated to you that I would cherish you for the rest of our lives. But since the first week, I know I sent you the message that you weren't important to me. Whenever you wanted to do _____ together, I would never do it. Whenever you wanted to go with me to _____ I wouldn't go. By choosing my own comfort and convenience over yours I have left you feeling that you weren't important to me, and I was an idiot to send you that message. You deserve more than that."

> Listen to her, don't just correct her

6. Have an insightful counselor show you how you contributed to her pain.

> The following list will be helpful.

How can a man determine what he has done to hurt his wife?

Many abandoned men are in this predicament, because they have always discredited their wives' "complaints" as emotionally based and therefore, unfounded. It is a wise man, however, who recognizes that whether or not his wife bases her feelings on logic, she still truly holds those feelings. To *her* they are valid. For example, she may not have actual grounds to fear for the family's financial future, but if she is afraid, then it is important to understand that those feelings of fear are real to her, and deserve compassion. Her feelings may be unfounded and not based on facts, but she feels them none the less.

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It is a wise man who will learn to validate his wife's emotional condition. He can do so by communicating his understanding of the genuineness of her feelings of distress, fear, heartache, etc. It is a foolish man who tries to talk a woman out of her feelings – worse, who belittles her for them. If an abandoned man is to repent to his wife of what he did to cause her hurt, he must do some intense soul searching and investigation.

Consider in Scripture, how Jesus responded to those who wept over the loss of Lazarus (John 11:33-35). Although he knew he was going to resurrect Lazarus from the dead, he empathized with their heartache. He didn't try to talk them into a more chipper attitude, by presenting them with the fact of Lazarus' forthcoming resurrection. He didn't remain perky, although he knew he had a great surprise in store for them. Verse 33 says that when Jesus saw them weeping, "...he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled," and verse 35 says, "

Jesus wept

." Although their grief was unfounded, he didn't invalidate their pain, he

felt

it.

1. Determine what she would likely say the offending actions are, if asked by another.

> Since your wife is the one who took offense at you, your ultimate goal is to see the situation through her eyes. You may view her perspective and subsequent accusations as groundless, but if you want to regain her trust, you will need to communicate to her that you understand what she has gone through.

2. Review her various accusations from over the years.

> She has probably told you many times why there is a problem. Perhaps only a sentence, or it may have been greatly exaggerated, but the nugget is probably there to be drawn out.

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3. Review your actions which seem to have caused her retreating reactions.

> Selfishness, angry outbursts, periods of neglect, unfulfilled promises, quiet bitterness, or any other offensive actions need to be considered carefully.

4. Ask someone close to your wife what the things are that she has complained to them about.

> Discretion must be observed here. You are gathering information, be sure you don't end up trying to win this person to your side. It's *reconciliation* you are seeking – not victory in a conflict.

5. Have a counselor help you dissect your life, opening each closet of your soul.

> One or two visits won't accomplish the task. You must drop your guard and be willing to receive reproof, instruction and encouragement.

6. Commit daily times to prayer and the Word, allowing Jesus to reveal your blind spots.

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> An insightful counselor will be able to help you discover your blind spots, but only Jesus can bring you into full acceptance of your true spiritual position and help you to accept responsibility for the course you must take.

7. Set aside a time each week to increase your spiritual sensitivity through fasting and prayer.

Typically a woman is hurt, because she made herself vulnerable by trying to get from her husband that which she is supposed to get from God. However, once in a victim mentality, she is in a spiritually weak condition, so is not typically open to hearing that she is reaping what she has sown.

Her real need: full submission to God, but remember, her weak faith is what brought her here in the first place. Do not expect to appeal to her faith in God. You are inadvertently calling her back to a faith she hasn't had in a long time. Her real problem is that it has been a long time since she has seen Jesus. Hearing her duty to obey God will not likely affect her. Hearing for the umpteenth time the biblical duties of a wife will have no impact. She does not trust God to see her through a challenge. To trust Him – she must see Jesus!

The only reason that she is in this desperate condition is that she lost sight of him at some time

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in the past. The faith to do what is right will only come if she sees Jesus like she did when she first met him. The absolute best way for a woman to repent of a hardened heart is for her to see Jesus!

I strongly recommend that a man listen to my message “ [Understanding the Heart of Your Wife](#) .” It will give deeper meaning to the basis of this article, and more thoroughly equip a man to do the job. You can read the description in our online catalog and order it from our toll free number.