



Choosing Wisely

Before *you* **DIVORCE**™

Facilitator's Guide


CHURCH.
INITIATIVE

Equipping churches for results

Before You Divorce
Facilitator's Guide

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Choosing Wisely

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Urgent

When problems develop in a marriage in our society, it's not uncommon for a couple to consider divorce. The stigma has lessened. The legal process has become simpler. The rationalization is strong. Emotions are out of control.

A high-speed, almost "automatic" process begins and rapidly gains momentum:

- ◆ One or both of the marriage partners retain an attorney.
- ◆ Separation occurs.
- ◆ Legal separation documents are prepared. (These same documents often define the subsequent terms of a divorce.)
- ◆ One or both parties begin a new relationship with another person.
- ◆ Divorce is granted. In some states, the divorce can be effective in a matter of weeks. In others, it may take several months or a year.

Some couples seek counseling before this process begins. Others attempt counseling as they march toward divorce. If the counseling is unsuccessful, then the countdown described above begins or continues.

Once underway, every step of this process takes the couple further from each other and closer to divorce. The momentum accelerates quickly as attorneys build walls between the couple, and friends or family members encourage each individual to "Get on with your life." The divorce train gains speed as it races down the track toward dissolution of the marriage and frequently becomes out of control and unable to stop.

Before You Divorce is designed as a tool to help you “stop the train.” It will help you cut through the deep emotion and hurt to paint a realistic, stark picture of what the couple can expect if they continue toward divorce. It becomes a “reality check” that will help keep families together. Couples will see that the pain and trauma of divorce are often much worse than the difficulties they now face in the marriage.

It is critical to note that the earlier you can intervene in a marriage crisis, the more likely it is that you can help reconcile the couple and prevent a divorce. Each day that the adversarial process is allowed to proceed lessens the chances of saving the marriage.

Use Before You Divorce as a loving intervention. It may help you keep a family together.

Before You Divorce Is

Stark

The videos paint a realistic, sometimes startling, picture of what it's like to go through a divorce. It's essential that the material is hard-hitting to break through the deep negative emotions that are a part of a marriage crisis.

Biblical

We have made every effort to remain true to biblical teaching on separation, divorce and remarriage. There is a strong focus on forgiveness and reconciliation on the videos. The accompanying workbook includes a daily Bible study.

Christ-centered

The couple is shown that a relationship with Christ is essential to the restoration of the marriage.

A ray of hope

The couple will see others who have been in situations similar to theirs and who were able to restore their marriages. In an era where marriage problems most often end in divorce, this series offers the hope of restoration and reconciliation.

Before You Divorce Is Not

Counseling

Each marriage is different, and each situation needs the wisdom and discernment of a pastor or Christian counselor. There is no substitute for individual counsel.

Marriage enrichment

This series does not attempt to teach couples how to communicate better, how to develop intimacy or other classic marriage enrichment topics. There are many excellent materials available to meet these needs.

Using These Materials

Before You Divorce can be used in a wide range of situations. It is designed to be a powerful tool that can be used by professionals and lay people alike:

Family and friends

It's not necessary to be a professional to use these tools. If you are aware of a marriage in crisis, you can use Before You Divorce materials to communicate the trauma of divorce and help motivate the couple to seek further help from a pastor or counselor. Don't be afraid to intervene. You may be the last hope of saving the marriage.

Pastors and ministers

These materials offer a structured supplement to counseling sessions. When you learn of a marriage crisis in your church, you'll have effective tools to help the couple hold the marriage together.

Counselors

Before You Divorce provides you with a tool to show the couple what life is like during and after divorce. It will help the marriage partners become more receptive to addressing the specific problems confronting them.

Creative Uses

While Before You Divorce was designed specifically to help couples avoid divorce, it can also be used as an effective curriculum in the following environments:

- ◆ Small group
- ◆ Marriage enrichment class
- ◆ Premarital counseling
- ◆ Young married class

Please let us know if you find other ways to effectively utilize the Before You Divorce materials. We'd love to hear your ideas.

The Materials

Before You Divorce includes

- ◆ five video sessions (on two DVDs).
- ◆ a workbook for each marriage partner (additional workbooks are available through Church Initiative).
- ◆ the Facilitator's Guide.

Video Sessions

Each video session addresses a different aspect of the divorce experience. The videos feature interviews with top experts on divorce topics from a Christian perspective, the real-life stories of people who have experienced separation and divorce, and on-location video. They are produced in an interesting-to-watch television magazine format. Here is a summary of each session:

Session 1

The Legal and Financial Impact of Divorce

Length: 38 minutes (Disc One)

The couple will see how complicated, expensive and brutal the legal process of divorce can be. They will also learn how divorce will negatively affect their financial position.

Session 2

The Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Effects of Divorce

Length: 56 minutes (Disc One)

This video vividly describes the havoc divorce can play on emotional health. The couple will learn the negative effects divorce can have on physical health and life expectancy. The video also examines the biblical perspective of divorce and how being outside of God's will on this subject can affect a person's spiritual life.

Session 3

The Many Effects of Divorce on Your Children

Length: 28 minutes (Disc One)

Viewers will hear from kids who have seen their families crumble because of divorce. Their heart-wrenching stories vividly portray how children are devastated when their parents divorce and how the divorce can negatively impact them for years to come.

(This video can be optional for couples without children. Note, however, that if one of the partners is involved in a relationship with someone who has children, it is important to know how those children could be affected.)

The final two video sessions show the couple how to “stop the train” and take the first two steps toward rebuilding their relationship.

Session 4

Forgiveness

Length: 47 minutes (Disc Two)

The couple will see a sensitive presentation about what forgiveness is and what it is not. They will learn the reasons why they should forgive the wrongs done them and why they should ask forgiveness for the things they’ve done to hurt each other. The video presents steps each person can take to begin the forgiveness process.

Session 5

Reconciliation

Length: 50 minutes (Disc Two)

Reconciliation of troubled marriages is now the exception rather than the desired path. This video offers hope by profiling three couples who separated under extremely difficult circumstances, then were able to reconcile and strengthen their marriages.

The video also deals with reconciliation between each marriage partner and God and presents the steps to invite Christ Jesus as personal Lord and Savior.

The Workbook

Both of the marriage partners will receive a workbook that will assist them in evaluating their specific circumstances. While this set of materials is entitled *Before You Divorce*, we have named the workbook *Choosing Wisely: Before You Divorce*. This has been done so the couple does not feel they are “broadcasting” their circumstances as they carry the workbooks to and from sessions with you.

Your *Before You Divorce Couple’s Kit* includes two workbooks (the *Counselor’s Kit* includes six workbooks). Whether you are a pastor, professional counselor or lay person, we recommend that you order an additional supply of workbooks to have on hand so you can respond quickly if you are presented with a couple in crisis.

The workbook includes several distinct sections:

Promise Page

This is a special page in the workbook designed to set the parameters for your work with the couple. The couple will make specific commitments to you, each other and to God about how they will conduct their lives during the time you are working with them.

Foundation for Healing

This section is a presentation of the gospel that stresses that true emotional and marital healing can only come through a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is written in a manner that is relevant to someone going through a marriage crisis. While some of the people you work with may have a relationship with Christ, many others will not, and it is important that this information is available to them in an easy-to-understand format.

Notes section

An outline is provided for each video session. This outline enables the couple to follow a structured format during the videos for note-taking, writing questions and emphasizing important points and Scriptures. Encourage them to write down anything they may wish to discuss further.

On Your Own personal Bible study

Typically, you will meet with the couple weekly. The On Your Own study is designed to give each partner five daily exercises to complete between sessions. The first part of the daily study is titled “In your life”; this section helps the couple connect what was seen on the video to the specific circumstances in their lives. The next part, “From the Bible,” is a short Bible study that directly addresses the week’s topic. The Bible study is written in a way that will be relevant and interesting, even to people who are not used to regular Bible study.

Resources for couples who are separated or divorced

Hopefully, the majority of people who are exposed to this material will not have separated. Unfortunately, there will be some couples who have already split and perhaps have even divorced. This section offers special help for these couples, including a formal “Agreement to Seek Reconciliation Through Christian Mediation,” which offers an infrastructure to help the couple begin the process of reconciliation.

Bookstore

This section of the workbook offers a selection of excellent books on a wide variety of issues related to marriage and divorce. All have been carefully screened to ensure that the topics are approached from a biblical, Christ-centered perspective.

Facilitator’s Guide

The book you are now reading is designed to help you effectively use the Before You Divorce materials. If you are a family member or friend of the couple, this book will equip you to meet with and help someone experiencing a marriage crisis. If you are a pastor or professional, this material is designed so that it can be adapted to your particular counseling technique.

At the back of this Facilitator's Guide is information on ordering additional materials for crisis marriages:

- ◆ Choosing Wisely: Before You Divorce workbooks
- ◆ Before You Divorce DVDs
- ◆ DivorceCare small group recovery program
- ◆ DivorceCare audio tracks on CD and downloadable audio files

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Session Goals

We suggest that you begin with two goals in mind while using the Before You Divorce materials:

- ◆ To delay or stop the pre-divorce (or pre-separation) process
- ◆ To persuade the couple to make a solid commitment to pursue reconciliation and full restoration of the relationship

If you are a friend or family member, you can direct the couple to counseling once they have met these goals. Remember, you don't have to be the counselor. You are there to "lovingly intervene" and help the couple achieve the goals noted above.

If you are a pastor or counselor, you can begin work on specific problems and issues after you have achieved these two objectives. Without reaching these goals, much of your effort in dealing with the marriage issues will be fruitless.

Meeting with the Couple

Family member or friend

How you interact with the couple will depend on how well you know them and how you came to know their circumstances. Remember to approach the situation prayerfully, but also remember that the sooner you become involved, the more likely the marriage can be saved. This is not a time to be timid.

1. The couple approaches you

If the couple, or one of the two, has approached you for advice or support, you are in an excellent position to use these materials to help. In situations such as this, at least one of the marriage partners may be reaching out and ready for your input.

2. You approach the couple

This is the process we call “loving intervention.” It is a little more difficult because the couple has not asked for your help, but you have become aware of their circumstances. Let us stress again that the situation is urgent because the marriage may be deteriorating daily. Ask the Lord for the courage to proceed and the discernment to know how to do so. If you are rejected, then pray that the couple will become open to your help at another time.

In either of the above scenarios, we suggest that you begin by asking the couple to agree to the commitments on the Promise Page. Then view one video per week with them. This can be done in your home or theirs, whichever is best under the circumstances. If you are married, it is ideal that your spouse join you and participate in the process.

You can use the discussion questions in this guide to help you with informal conversation after viewing the video. Remember that your purpose is not to become involved in the specific (and often complicated) problems that have brought the couple to the crisis, but rather to work toward the two goals listed on page 13. Once you have reached these goals, you can guide the couple to appropriate counsel to assist in dealing with the specific issues.

You may find that the couple does not have much to say after viewing the videos. This is understandable because they have just viewed information that is jolting and may be contrary to their perception of divorce. It may take a while for them to process the information. Don't worry if the discussion time is limited. Turn them over to the Lord, and ask Him to work in their hearts in the coming week.

Ask the couple if they are willing to pray with you about their situation. Use discernment on this matter, and don't force the issue, but recognize that prayer can help develop spiritual intimacy in the marriage.

Conversely, you may encounter couples who want to talk extensively about their circumstances, complaints or hurts. Participate in such conversation only if you sense your involvement is constructive, and ask the Lord to give you discernment about how far to take the discussion. Also remember that it's OK to limit the discussion and focus on the two main goals you are trying to achieve. As a lay person, your primary goal is to help the couple stop the march toward divorce and to encourage them to commit to restoring the marriage. Once they have taken these steps, you can guide them to appropriate counsel.

Pastor or counselor

We suggest scheduling a series of weekly sessions. During the first session, you would introduce the couple to the process and secure the commitment of each on the Promise Page of the workbook.

You then have several options for using the videos:

- ◆ View the video sessions with the couple during your meetings with them.
- ◆ Loan the DVDs to the couple, and ask them to view the video sessions and complete the corresponding On Your Own sections of the workbook prior to your meetings with them. (Please note that there is potential for you to "lose" DVDs using this technique.)

- ◆ Ask the couple to view the video sessions in your office any time prior to your meetings with them. They would then complete the On Your Own material in the days following each video session.

We have provided some thought-provoking discussion questions, which can be used to help guide your post viewing conversation with the couple (whichever technique you select). These questions are provided in the “Discussion Questions” section of the Facilitator’s Guide (page 20).

Essential Prayer

In addition to your direct involvement with the couple, it is critical that you pray fervently for this couple. *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” James 5:16b.*

Here are some specific things you can request from the Lord on behalf of the couple.

Pray that He will ...

- ◆ create a desire in both spouses to reconcile the marriage.
- ◆ protect the marriage partners and their children.
- ◆ keep inappropriate influences out of the marriage.
- ◆ heal the hurts that both spouses and the children have experienced.
- ◆ help each spouse to forgive each other.
- ◆ help both marriage partners and their children develop a closer relationship with the Lord through Jesus Christ.
- ◆ guide you in the most appropriate ways to help the couple.
- ◆ bring restoration to the marriage, and pray that their relationship will blossom into a union that will honor the Lord and be an example for others.

Closure

At some point, the couple will make one of two decisions:

- ◆ **Commit to reconcile**
- ◆ **Proceed with plans to separate or divorce**

If the couple chooses the latter option, you have little recourse other than to pray frequently for them. It would be counterproductive in most cases to continue to attempt to persuade them to change their minds; however, there may be further biblical action that your church should take (see note on Matthew 18 in subsequent “Questions and Answers” section).

Also remember that the investment you have made in this couple may bear fruit at a later time. It may take time for them to fully absorb and digest this material. Even if the divorce actually occurs, it is still possible for the couple to reconcile. Dr. Jim Talley worked with a couple who divorced and was apart for 12 years before reconciling!

Questions and Answers

Here are some questions that might be on your mind as you consider how to use these materials in the fabric of your ministry.

What if one of the marriage partners is not willing to participate?

It is still beneficial to share this material with the “willing” partner. The Forgiveness and Reconciliation sessions can help prepare him or her for the potential that the other spouse might become interested in reconciliation at a later date.

What if there is physical abuse by one of the spouses?

While normally we would encourage the couple to remain together, if family members are in physical danger, it is critical that the couple separate until the underlying problems are resolved and there is a change of behavior by the abusing spouse. If you are unable to provide housing for the abused spouse, there are group homes for such families in many communities.

This situation is addressed in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11: *“To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.”*

What if one or both spouses do not want to pursue reconciliation?

If both are members of a church, it may be appropriate for the church to become involved formally as described in Matthew 18: 15–17: *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”*

If you believe such action is called for, discreetly discuss the matter with the pastor or a key church leader.

What about mediation?

Secular mediation is a “clean” way to avoid the pitfalls of court if the couple decides to divorce. It is rarely a vehicle for reconciliation. Spiritual mediation (as described in the workbook) can be a tool that leads to reconciliation.

What if one spouse is involved in an affair?

It is less likely (but not impossible) that a person involved in an affair would participate in sessions with his or her spouse. If that is the case, attempt to view the videos with him or her individually. He or she needs to see this material. It may provide the motivation to break off the affair. If the person continues in the affair, then it may be appropriate to involve the church as described previously.

Can these videos be used individually or by the couple without the involvement of an outsider?

Any viewing is better than none, but it is best to have the involvement of an objective party, if at all possible.

Have I failed if the couple goes ahead with the divorce?

No. The Bible commands us to confront sin: “*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted*” Galatians 6:1. You have been faithful by your loving intervention. “*Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins*” James 5:20.

What if the couple does get a divorce?

As you will see on the videos, there is tremendous hurt and pain that will occur as a consequence. Help one or both spouses connect with a nearby DivorceCare support group. He or she will continue to be exposed to teaching on reconciliation, and there is still the possibility that the marriage could be restored. If not, at least you are in a position of helping to heal the hurt that has occurred.

To find the nearest DivorceCare group, contact Church Initiative at 800-489-7778 (US and Canada), 919-562-2112 (local and international) or search our database of support group locations on the internet at www.divorcecare.org (Find a Group tab).

Discussion Questions

Session 1

1. What part of the video caused you the most concern? Why?
2. Who has the greatest amount of outside influence in your consideration of divorce? How much influence does this person have?
3. Have you hired an attorney? How far has the process advanced?
4. How did you feel about the description of divorce as “war”?
5. Do you think you could avoid the adversarial nature of divorce if you proceed with one? Why or why not?
6. Can your income support a second household? Explain.
7. If you are not currently working, what would you do and how much would you earn?

Session 2

1. How have your marriage problems affected your energy level?
2. If you proceed with divorce, you will experience losses. Look at the list on page 30 of your workbook. Which of these losses would be most painful for you? Why?
3. Describe the physical problems you have experienced as a result of your current stress.
4. Are you involved in another relationship? If so, to what level has that relationship advanced?
5. Are you willing to give up that relationship to restore your marriage? Why or why not?
6. Where do you believe you stand in relation to the Bible’s teaching on divorce? Are you comfortable about your position?

7. Do you sense that there is anything about your current situation God is trying to tell you? What?
8. Have you surrendered your life to Christ? If not, why?

Session 3

1. How did your children become aware of the marital difficulties you and your spouse are experiencing?
2. How have they been affected?
3. What is your biggest concern regarding your children if you proceed with separation or divorce?
4. How would you feel if another person became your child's stepparent? Why?
5. How would your children react to another relationship or remarriage? (Describe each child's reaction.)
6. What impacted you most about this video? Why?

Session 4

1. What are the major things you need to ask your spouse forgiveness for?
2. Are you willing to ask for this forgiveness from him or her right now?
3. What actions do you feel that your spouse needs to ask *your* forgiveness for?
4. Are you willing to forgive these actions right now?
5. If not, what is the barrier that is keeping you from forgiving?
6. Have you sought God's forgiveness for your sins? If not, why?

Session 5

1. Have you considered a commitment to reconciliation?
Why or why not?
2. Why is reconciliation not widely pursued in our society today?
3. What do you consider to be the major barriers to the reconciliation of your marriage?
4. What needs to happen to tear down those barriers?
5. Are you willing to commit formally to the reconciliation process? (See page 87 in your workbook.)
6. If not, what would it take for you to make that commitment?

About Church Initiative

Church Initiative is a church-equipping ministry. The core of the concept of “church-equipping” is the idea that everyone in a church is a minister, and the gifts and talents needed to accomplish a ministry are found in the people of the church. No pastor can do it alone; a pastor and church staff cannot bear the weight of such ministry by themselves. They must have help and support from lay people in the church.

Our job is to produce materials to help you effectively minister to people in your community through your church. We believe that the members of a local church should be on the front lines of the gospel ministry ... and these materials have been designed to help you do that job.

Church Initiative is a nondenominational, nonprofit ministry serving thousands of churches around the world.

These video resources bring together insights from many experts including Kay Arthur, Dr. Bill Bright, Larry Burkett, Dr. Les Carter, Rev. Noel Castellanos, Dr. Tim Clinton, Dr. Jim Conway, Dr. John Coulombe, Dr. Larry Crabb, Elisabeth Elliot, Dr. Tony Evans, Jim Grassi, Dr. Archibald Hart, Dr. E. V. Hill, Dr. Robert Jeffress, Barbara Johnson, Dr. Erwin Lutzer, Dr. Ray Pritchard and H. Norman Wright.

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