



## **The Grief Process in Divorce**

Christians divorce as much as non-Christians, and it is one of the most painful experiences people go through. It is like having gangrene and being told by the doctor that you have to cut off your arm. You don't want to, but you know you have no choice. You do what you have to do, and yet the adjustment to living life without your arm will be lengthy, and your life will never quite be the same, though you will eventually heal, adjust, and accept life without your arm, as you will do with your divorce.

The healing process requires you to go through the same grief process that people go through with other losses. Here is how it works with divorce:

1. Denial happens first to protect you from the overwhelming shock of the divorce. This is healthy as long as it doesn't last so long that you don't do what you need to do to take care of yourself.
2. Anger and blame follow. You may get mad at God for allowing it to happen, your spouse for his/her part, yourself for not doing things differently, and maybe even others who contributed to the problems such as in-laws, friends, or the person your spouse was unfaithful with (if that was a factor).
3. Bargaining gives you the illusion that you can do something to change your situation. You pray and promise God you will do certain things if He fixes it. You tell yourself you can make changes that will bring your spouse back. Or you bargain with your spouse and try to convince him/her to try it again.
4. Finally, the sadness hits. You feel the LOSS. You feel depressed, hopeless, unable to concentrate, unable to get out of bed, unable to go to work, and unable to complete regular routines. It feels overwhelming, unbearable, and unending. You feel like you will never recover enough to be happy and enjoy your life.
5. Eventually, acceptance comes. You stop fighting the inevitable, accepting that there is nothing you can do except move on. The emotional pain ebbs. You stop trying to figure out whose fault it was and how it could have been avoided. You recognize you both had a part in the marriage failing, even if one of you was more responsible. You acknowledge that God gives each of us free choice, and you realize that God did not cause the divorce. You begin to feel hope. You are able to function normally. And with acceptance comes the ability to begin rebuilding a new life for yourself—at first one moment at a time, then one day at a time, and eventually you live your life normally.

God has a plan for Christians that go through divorce and he understands the grief process you need to go through. He is there to walk beside you. Psalm 23 promises that your Shepherd will lead you and guide you and that “goodness and love will follow you all the days of your life” – but the grief process requires you first to walk through the valley of the shadow of death to grieve your divorce before your new life can begin.

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