



## After divorce - Thirty common questions

### **We're only separated; now what?**

Divorce is hard enough, but separation has its own unique pain because there's no finality, no apparent moving back or forward. It's relationship "limbo". The first thing to do is stay open to reconciliation, if possible. Each situation will require certain steps but for most couples this is a time for patience, practical planning and doing the following:

(1) *Pray!* Ask God to help you keep your primary focus on Him and His will for you. In a certain sense, the marriage--whether valid or not, salvageable or not--is secondary to your love for and faithfulness to God. Get to confession. Visit the Blessed Sacrament. Call on Him throughout the day. Draw close to Him.

(2) *Get some professional counseling* and spiritual guidance. Try to clearly identify how you two got to this point so that you can work to solve the crises. Many couples make a sincere effort to get back together, but their core problems have not been addressed. Over time they'll return, and the hurt will be recycled. Remember: Nothing changes if nothing changes.

(3) *Set and enforce healthy boundaries.* If there's infidelity, addiction or other sinful behavior going on, refuse to let it back into your life and home. That doesn't mean you have to divorce. It means get help and let your intellect lead, not your emotions (fear, guilt, regret, etc.)

(4) Make an emergency plan. Money, kids, housing, and other practical issues need attention especially during separation. Stop all unnecessary activity and spending for a few months or longer. Don't just wait and do nothing. Whatever you must do to stabilize the home, do it on a temporary basis. Start getting help on any practical issues where you need instruction or counseling.

(5) *Entrust your spouse and family to St. Joseph and Our Blessed Mother.* These two powerful allies of ours have been given great gifts by Jesus to help us on earth who are trying to keep our families together. They hold a treasure of graces that can truly help you. Call on them!

If you can't reconcile with your spouse, stay reconciled to the Truth. Take a day at a time.

**Bible:** In peace I lie down and at once fall asleep, for it is You and none other, Yahweh, who make me rest secure. Psalm 4:8

**Catechism:** Mary's function as mother of men... flows forth from the superabundance of merits of Christ (alone), rests on His mediation (to the Father), depends entirely on it, and draws all its power from it. (Lumen Gentium) CCC 970

## Why do I hurt so much?

People are made to bond with each other at various appropriate levels. When that bond is broken, it hurts. People cry when their parents die, their best friend moves away, or their co-worker is transferred. There is pain in separation with loved ones.

Marriage is meant to be the highest level of union between people, uniting husband and wife into "one flesh". What is one-flesh?

It's two unique individuals who form an intimate, deeply personal communion that mirrors the loving union of the Persons in the Trinity: they

remain separate, but in a sense they also ‘disappear’ into each other at the same time. They become “one.” They merge, meld, and give themselves totally to one another. Like Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do. From that union should come great security, love, peace, and joy.

But when spouses separate or civilly divorce after forming emotional, sexual, financial, parental, social, and spiritual bonds—becoming “one”—they do not separate . . . they TEAR apart. So (and here’s a key principle) the deeper the emotional attachment one has (or had), the deeper the pain.

Pain can also signal grave fear. Marriage sometimes becomes a person’s entire identity or their security. When it’s lost, panic arises, and a person may often fight or flounder to grab hold of a quick substitute. Our goal is to help you discover the truth of your identity and your security. No role in marriage (spouse or parent) should ever be the center of your life; that place is reserved for God alone. When you are willing to begin to put Him at the center of your heart, He will heal you from the inside out. That’s His promise.

**Bible:** This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and they become one flesh. Gen 2:24

**Catechism:** ...the first sin had for its first consequence the rupture of the original communion between man and woman. Their relations were distorted . . . a relationship of domination and lust. CCC 1607

### **Why am I taking so long to heal?**

You may look at others who seem to heal more quickly, or even your ex-spouse who seems to have moved on. Stop comparing!

Each person is unique and unrepeatable; the way each experiences divorce will be just as unique. No one will experience divorce quite the same way you do.

Most people enter marriage with still-unhealed wounds from their past. They also bring huge hopes and dreams for the future. In between all that is an unrealistic view of the world in general that they hope will be disproved as life passes. They believe their marriage has taken care of all that. So, when divorce hits, these past issues and future hopes are also brought to the surface like raw nerves. And then something else happens: not only are you facing the reality of a failed marriage, but you are being forced to face the MUCH BIGGER reality of life itself.

It's hard, it's fragile, and it's not easy. People betray you. Jobs disappoint. Diets fail. Cost of living keeps increasing. Your body parts keep sagging and youth is passing. It may seem that ALL of life's golden opportunities have passed you by. You could afford a house back then, but not now. You could "get a guy" years ago, but not now. You could have risen to the top of the company and retired early, but not now. And on top of that you are alone to face caring for your children and your aging parents. As they say, "life sucks and then you die."

The healing of divorce thus requires your willingness to eventually look past the marriage issues to the bigger picture of life: to why you were born in the first place, why God made you, and where you are headed for eternity. Too often, our marriage and family has become our "god" and when we lose it, we suffer deep and dark, fearful, and frantic insecurities.

Our materials invite you to take deep breath, step back, and allow God to show you His love, mercy, promises and His vision for your life. One that is filled with great hope even within the pain, and rich in a love that never fails.

**Bible:** We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 2 Cor 4:8-9

**Catechism:** The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for. CCC 27

## What can I do to feel better?

Doctors used to give a sucker to the child who sat still for her shots; even adults need a little “sugar” to help them get through the pain of divorce. But a new relationship, a spending blitz, or a half-gallon of Haagen Dazs in one sitting will only hurt you more overall. We offer healthy ideas to help you through this tough time: slowing down; getting lots of rest, unloading your overscheduled calendar for a while, taking walks, or listening to beautiful music.

Blow the dust off your bible and spend a few minutes reading the Psalms; you'll relate to the deep heart cries and discover the calming, reassuring promises of God to take care of you.

And remember that feelings come and go. Feeling better may not mean you are better. Only the spiritual Truth will bring you the deepest healing. Perhaps you may never have thought about going to sit before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. He promised never to leave you and left His real, true, and substantial Presence available to you in the Eucharist. Quiet time with Him, crying, unloading, problem solving or even better . . . just listening . . . can help you feel better.

**Bible:** No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Joshua 1:4-6

**Catechism:** The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself . . . CCC 2096 -2097

## Where can I go for help?

If we are the Body of Christ, that means the people in your local church should be His arms, His legs, and His smile for you. Check to see if there is a “Catholic Divorce Survival Guide” program available in your area. If not,

you can order the DVDs online. Maybe later you can facilitate a group in your parish.

Call your best friend or family member who has an open heart, a listening ear, and who's walking closely with Our Lord. Avoid advice from those who tell you to get over it, to move on, or to take your ex for all he or she is worth in court. Especially ignore the counsel to go out and find a new relationship.

Often, divorce reveals deep heart wounds that you may have carried from your childhood into the marriage. Full healing from divorce might mean attention to other such issues. Look for a reputable Catholic psychotherapist in your area ( [CatholicTherapists.com](http://CatholicTherapists.com) ) but be smart: not all therapists are grounded in the faith or give sound advice. However, God can use anyone of His choosing to help you, so keep asking Him for direction. Many therapists offer internet or telephone support.

Don't think you need some type of counseling? Do-it-yourself saves money on car washes but might be stupid when it comes to healing from divorce.

**Bible:** Fools think the way they go is straight, the wise listens to advice.  
Prov 12:15

**Catechism:** God wills the interdependence of creatures . . . to complete each other, in the service of each other. CCC 340

### **Why did God allow this?**

God is not a puppet master. While in an overarching way He is completely "in control", He also let go (in a sense) of that control so we could have free will. God does not WILL evil, but he PERMITS it, to safeguard the gift of our free will. *Free will is required for true love*; it is at once a glorious gift and a heavy burden.

But God also promises from the hurtful things that happen to bring forth a GREATER GOOD. Look at the crucifix . . . how could a loving God let his

only Son suffer and die that hideous death? Because from that greatest evil came the greatest GOOD . . . our salvation!

You may look at bad things and think they are the end but wait and see what gifts can come from an evil like divorce. When you send your kids off to school for the first time, you do not WILL their being bullied on the playground or other suffering, but you PERMIT it for a greater good: their growing up, learning, and becoming the person God intended. Real love does not keep a child “safely” locked away from all pain. Real love stands by faithfully, helping the child to grow from it.

Many say that through their divorce they finally found God; they grew closer to Him, changed their lives, and found deep inner peace. They came back to the gifts of His church, had better relationships with their children, and learned what life was all about. Not to discount injustices and pain that you have suffered, but these are some unexpected treasures that can be yours!

**Bible:** All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Rom 8:28

**Catechism:** God created man . . . who can control his own actions. “God willed that mans should be ‘left in the hand of his own counsel,’ so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him.” CCC 1730

## Why can't I forgive?

You're not alone, we all struggle with forgiveness! But when you learn more about this complex topic, and if you let God's grace work in you, you'll get there. And in the meantime, consider asking God to show you where you need to seek forgiveness (as a separate act) for the ways in which you failed. You'll never be freer.

Forgiveness is not:

- A feeling
- Letting the other person off the hook

- Forgetting the wounds he/she caused you
- Blindly trusting him or her again (that may be very irresponsible!)
- Feeling friendly toward the person
- Thinking that you must be “friends” again (it may not be possible right now)
- Having to dismiss restitution that should be paid

Forgiveness is:

- An act of the will
- Choosing to detach from revenge
- Trusting that God will bring perfect justice in His time (and His way)
- Knowing it’s okay not to like someone but to still love him/her
- Still being able to kindly set and enforce healthy boundaries with the person
- Seeing the other person as deserving of kindness, even if you don’t like him/her
- Focusing less on your rights and more on your responsibility to forgive
- Obedience to God’s command

**Bible:** And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.  
Mark 11:24-26

**Catechism:** (The heart’s) Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation . . . by the admission of faults to one’s brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one’s cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance. CCC 1435

## I have so much guilt. What can I do?

Feelings of guilt can be like warning gauges on the car: they signal that something is wrong, and we SHOULD pay attention to them. But first



understand that there is a distinction between "Genuine" guilt and "False Guilt".

"Genuine guilt" has been described as an authentic grieving of your spirit because you KNOW you have failed, hurt, or used someone, and you regret having done so. Thank God for this, because it should move you to change direction away from self and back to Love. It is a maturity that takes responsibility for one's sins. If only I had been less selfish, maybe he/she would not have left. I blew it.

"False guilt" is more of a fear of rejection for having failed to perform to someone's standards. It comes from a mixture of pride and a disordered reliance on others' opinions and approval and a fear that if you lose it, you'll be lost. Some call this codependency. If only I were thinner, richer, or was more sexually available, maybe he/she would not have left.

Both come from a sense of failure. But remember we all fail. And it's not the world's expectations we should live up to, it's God's. Failure alone is not a reason for divorce. Forgiveness, mercy, and grace are available to you from God at every moment and in every circumstance...even when they are not available to you from others.

Dealing with guilt can be complex because each person and his/her circumstance is unique. It usually takes courageous soul-searching and the help of a good counselor and/or spiritual director. But there is one thing you can do RIGHT NOW:

Ask God to reveal to you the truth of your failings, where genuine sorrow and repentance is necessary, versus where you may be clinging to false guilt. *Go immediately to confession for God's loving and tender mercy*, and the graces necessary to grow stronger in love. It is a loving encounter with Jesus Himself! Then go to whomever you have hurt and seek forgiveness for the ways you have failed him or her.

Repentance means turning from sin and back to love: stop fighting in court. Let the kids see their other parent. Pay the child support. Stop bad-mouthing him/her. Let go of the bitterness. Take the high road.

**Bible:** Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger, abundant in mercy. He will not always accuse and nurses no lasting anger. Psalm 103:8-9

**Catechism:** This who approach the Sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins... CCC1422

## What if I don't trust the Church?

You're not alone. Many Catholics who suffer the pain of divorce come back after a long time, hoping to find some solid footing, but not really knowing what to expect. We'll help you find your way.

If you've been hurt by someone in the Church, consider this: In the field of medicine there are insurance frauds, rip off artists, doctors who should lose their licenses, and of course a whole world of mysterious medical talk that we really don't understand.

It's the same with the Catholic Church. Jesus, the Great Physician, built His church as a hospital; through it He can—and most importantly He WANTS TO—work healing wonders in your heart and soul. But you might encounter some less-than-perfect people along the way, even a “Nurse Ratched” or two! Don't give up.

Please keep an open mind; you are welcome. We are here for you. We want to introduce you to the Church in a way you maybe have never known. We hope you won't let the past keep you away from the gifts, the blessings, and the strength He wants for you.

**Bible:** Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Matt 16:18

**Catechism:** From the church (you) receive the Word of God . . . the grace of the sacraments that sustains (you) on the way . . . and an example of holiness. CCC 2030

## **I'm furious! What can I do with this anger?**

Well, put away the shotgun, that will only get you jail time (hard beds, bad food).

Anger at injustice (real or perceived) is not necessarily a sin, but what you do with that anger can be. Have you let it fester into resentment or bitterness? That will only keep you an emotional prisoner of the other person, and it is bad for the heart, growth of tumors, weight gain, and is the enemy of a creamy complexion!

Most people have a strong desire for justice and their anger is often a response to feeling the other person is going to get away "scott-free" with their 'crimes'. God promises justice, but in His time and His way. We must stop trying to be God.

He alone is Perfect Justice . . . and Perfect Mercy at the same time. Learn more about what the church teaches about the passions in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 1762 - 1775). Pray to trust Him more. Read His promises in Scripture. Believe them!

**Bible:** Be angry, but do not sin. Eph 4:25 - 27

**Catechism:** Passions are morally good when they contribute to a good action, evil in the opposite case. CCC 1767 - 1770

## **How do I help my kids?**

By helping yourself FIRST. It's smart, not selfish. Imagine you all flew out of a car crash . . . you can't crawl over and help the kids when you are rapidly losing blood yourself. You'll last longer and be in a better position to help

more family members if you first tie a tourniquet around your own gaping wound.

Airline stewards always tell you that, in the event of an emergency, you must put the oxygen mask on yourself first, not your child. Why? If you pass out, you will be no help to your baby.

After divorce we want to help you learn to let go of many things, slow down, take rest, get help, pray more, talk things out, solve problems, find solutions, create a new life, and learn to forgive. These are invaluable life-lessons that you can pass along to your children only after you learn them first. *You are the best and primary teacher of your children in these areas.*

The most important lesson you must learn and pass on is the priority of God in every area of your life, the continual surrender of your will to His, and the desire to seek Him ever more.

Keep listening to your kids; they will each experience divorce differently. Don't over-indulge them or ease up in normal routine or discipline. Don't over-schedule or over-stimulate them. Read good Catholic parenting books (try our expert and author, Dr. Ray Guarendi), get counseling, a good Catholic life coach, pray . . . and play!

**Bible:** Read the story of Eli, a godly man, who was a loving but weak parent who failed to teach his sons respect for their father or for the Lord. See what happened! 1 Sam 2:12 - 36

**Catechism:** Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones." Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. CCC 2221 – 2233

## How do I stop my kids from acting out?

Except in extreme cases, most children of divorce "act out" because they are trying to express themselves and don't know a better way.

A child's response to divorce, or any life event, will be a combination of their natural temperament (some are born loud or quiet, cheerful, or prone to negativity), their learned patterns within the home, their history with you, social and peer influences, how tired they are, what level of fears they have, how hungry they are, and many more factors.

The better question might be, "What is my child trying to say . . . and how can I make him feel safe in sharing?"

This is a time for patience, but not tolerating disrespect; for giving time, attention and understanding to a child, without allowing them to overindulge their emotions. You probably need some help, and a good Catholic coach can guide you in this. But until then, remember:

- Slow down. Turn off the electronics and be available to talk.
- Be patient. Try again tomorrow.
- Ask questions instead of lecturing. Listen before talking.
- Encourage the child to use his reason, not just his emotions.
- Apologize if you need to.
- Request an apology from them if they owe it to you or others in the family.
- Don't give false reassurances.
- Be honest. It makes the child feel safer when you tell the truth.
- Don't bash the other parent.
- Don't put the child in the middle.
- Keep healthy routines and structure but stay flexible.
- Always expect respect, but don't intimidate or demand.
- Never tolerant abusive attitudes, language, or behavior.
- Don't try to do this all yourself. Get good counseling.
- Encourage your child to join you in turning to God for help and comfort.

**Bible:** My child, hold to sound advice and prudence, never let them out of sight . . . When you go to bed, you will not be afraid; once in bed, your sleep will be sweet. Proverbs 3:21-24

**Catechism:** Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will

of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God's law.  
CCC 2222

## What about my adult children?

You can't change your children--or anyone--but you can change your own attitude. Do any of these apply to your adult children?

- A naïve hope that time alone will make things better
- Knowing what to do but being too proud, scared, cheap, or undisciplined to do it
- Blaming, being unwilling, or not knowing how to forgive
- A doubt that God will bring justice in His own time
- An emotional attachment (a “payoff”) to being a victim of divorce
- Staying stuck in the role of protector of one of the parents

These ways of thinking/acting need to be surrendered—along with one’s entire life—to a loving Lord. Most people only let go of the hurt/anger when they begin to believe HOW MUCH GOD LOVES THEM. So, as much as you want to do something, start by letting your children see God’s love through you.

Be available to listen without over-enmeshment or managing them.

Become a “consultant “ on whom they can safely (without criticism, shame, or control) bounce fears, hopes, and ideas.

Consider prayer and sacrifice; Scripture tells us the source of all healing comes from Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice. (Isaiah 53:5 and 1 Peter 2:24). What suffering are you willing to “offer up” for your children’s emotional healing? Skip a meal, forgo a new purchase, go without your favorite TV show, and offer it up (united with Christ’s perfect sacrifice). It works!

**Bible:** Through his bruises you have been healed. 1 Peter 2:24

**Catechism:** The only perfect sacrifice is the one that Christ offered on the cross ... By uniting ourselves with this sacrifice we can make our lives a sacrifice to God. CCC 2100

## How do I handle my difficult ex?

Do you still have deep emotional ties that keep you entangled?  
Are you still expecting your ex to change?

Don't pray so much for the other person as for yourself, to let go of your unrealistic expectations. Frustration come from still being emotionally, legally, or financially locked-in to someone who is not working with you.

Stop trying to change the person and instead ask first for conversion of your own heart. This doesn't mean accepting unfairness; it means not letting it control you. Despite your feelings, try to see the other person as God does, and act in a way that is kind, generous, and mature.

*Do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness?* Unforgiveness and pride keep us engaged in battle. Don't blame; instead, get smart, try to look past the surface to the real problem, and find a workable solution.

*Still waiting for that child support check to come?* Don't scream . . . redo your budget and learn to live without the income. Yes, it can be possible! If the money ever arrives, put it in savings.

*She won't let you visit your children on your birthday?* Let it go and celebrate on another day. The way things are now—as unfair as they may be—will probably change. Work to change what you can and let go of the rest. And maybe ask God to help you grow up a little (or a lot).

**Bible:** He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. Prov 16:32

**Catechism:** Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a

turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed . . . it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace. CCC 1431

## Help, I'm drowning in debt!

Oh, how we all struggle with “needs” versus “wants”! Most people never learned to live on a budget, even within their marriage. This is a good time for you to learn the FREEDOM from fear and anxiety that comes from living within your means.

Divorce may have economically thrown you into the ocean, but reordering your financial life is a real lifesaver. This is a time to see where continued overspending might be coming from a lack of self-discipline in other areas, fear of not getting what you think you deserve, a tendency to laziness or avoidance . . . or simply no one ever teaching you how.

Get on a budget. Anticipate all your annual expenses, including birthdays, holidays, school, vacations, new tires, doctor, and dentist visits, etc. Get someone to help you or try [www.VeritasFinancialMinistries.com](http://www.VeritasFinancialMinistries.com) . Then ask yourself, “Does anyone really need a \$500 , um...\$300, er....\$100 purse?”

Detachment from material goods does not mean rejecting these gifts, but rightly ordering your thinking about them. Pray for the grace to see money and possessions in the light God wants you to see them: as gifts, none ever taking the place of the provision and satisfaction only He can give.

Get a good Catholic coach to help you create a life plan.

**Bible:** But first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matt 6:33

**Catechism:** The tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly good without limit. CCC 2536



## What will happen in court?

You never know for sure. The law intends to bring justice but in a disordered world it could be a crapshoot.

Scripture tells us it would be wise to try to settle your issues before you get into the courtroom. Sometimes, though, that is not possible.

Court battles can make you feel like you got sent straight to jail for having a failed marriage. “Prison” can be losing parental rights or getting stuck with paying crippling legal fees, or both. It’s also “prison” to be continually engaged in battle, to lock horns with someone you once loved. It only drives nails deeper into the wounds.

After divorce, a good principle to embrace is “being willing to lose in order to win” like the guy who let go of the tug-of-war rope because it was burning the flesh right off his hands! If you are close to an agreement, consider not holding out for those last items so you can “win.” Let it go. Be generous, even when it is not fair. Each situation warrants careful and prayerful consideration. Trust God, not the courts.

**Bible:** Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Matthew 5:25

**Catechism:** You shall love the Lord with all your heart . . . and your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law CCC 2055

## What about child support?

Both parents have a financial responsibility for their children. But both are called to move beyond what’s “fair” or even legal to what is both necessary and generous. But that does not guarantee they will live up to those obligations.

If you have the majority of physical custody, are you expecting an amount the other parent just cannot pay? Are you caught up in arguments or manipulation to get what you think the children deserve? Do you wait month to month for the check to arrive and get angry when it's late or doesn't show up at all? Then it may be time to take another look and see how you can get off the emotional money merry-go-round. The other parent's failures aside, you may be responding in a way that is sinful and requires Confession. And maybe even asking the other parent for forgiveness for your attitude.

If you're the parent ordered to pay support, are you being responsible? Have you failed to make a realistic budget for yourself so you can help take care of the kids? Or are you resenting having to provide for your children? Do you refuse any extra financial help that may not be "fair" but could be a blessing to the children? Do you owe back support? Do you deliberately withhold or make late payments? Then it may be time to take a hard look at your own failures, get to Confession, make financial restitution the best you can, and ask the other parent for their forgiveness.

Just do it.

**Bible:** But first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matt 6:33

**Catechism:** The tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly good without limit. CCC 2536

## How do I deal with all this anxiety?

Anxiety is a form of fear, and some say that there are only two responses in life: *love and fear*. All good thoughts and feelings come from love, all negative ones are rooted in some type of fear: fear of losing, fear of injustice, fear of rejection, fear of not being loved, fear of failure, fear of losing power and control, fear of loss of self, and the list goes on.

Don't be ashamed to admit you are afraid. It's not a sign of weakness. Excessive focus, worry or anxiety are all manifestations of the same thing: fear. It's a normal human response and sometimes the right way to respond!

We must ask God to help us replace excessive or unhealthy fear with faith. God alone can sustain us, feed us, help us, save us, and love us unconditionally and without end. That is our Catholic faith. But sometimes we don't really believe that; or we may believe it intellectually, but our emotions are in doubt. If others have failed us, we may think God will, too. And when we let our emotions rule rather than our intellect, well . . . all hell can break loose, and fears can overwhelm us.

A good spiritual exercise is making a list of all your fears, categorized by every area of your life, taking them to God in prayer and then reading what Scripture has to say about those fears! Do you know how many times God tells us to "Be not afraid" or "Fear not" in the Bible? 365 times . . . one for every day of the year.

**Bible:** Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path. Prov 3:4-5 (P.S. Memorize this one!)

**Catechism:** The apprehension of evil causes hatred, aversion, and fear of the impending evil; this movement ends in sadness at some present evil, or in the anger that resists it. CCC 1765

### **Can I still receive Communion?**

Divorced and not remarried? Yes, you may receive (if you are not in a state of serious sin; if so, get to Confession first). While divorce can be the fruit of sin, it is not always something that prohibits you from receiving the Eucharist.

If, however, you have remarried outside the church without a Decree of Nullity (annulment) you are required to refrain from presenting yourself for

Eucharist (no matter who tells you otherwise). Why not? By reason of your baptism, you'll always be a Catholic and expected to live by the standards she received from Jesus himself. For your best and that of the rest of the community. Even though you're still a member of the Body of Christ, still part of the family, when you attempt(ed) marriage outside the Church (whether you are aware or understand it or not) you stepped outside the family. Until the situation can be corrected, you're not yet in FULL communion.

Receiving the Eucharist is an act that has significant private and public dimensions. It is a living witness to the fact that you believe all that the Church teaches, and you humbly submit yourself to Christ through the Sacrament. If in fact you have not submitted, then it would be a "lie" to RECEIVE Communion if you are not yet back IN full communion with His Church. Anyone who has removed himself from "communion" with the Church is expected to refrain from the sacrament until the situation can be cleared up.

Is this a punishment? No, it's a respect for the sanctity of marriage.

Imagine you're driving a car without the pink slip. The "law" would not permit you to possess or drive that car until the ownership issues are cleared up. That is not a punishment, but an upholding of a sometimes complex law that protects everyone concerned as well as the general public. Most people understand this and go immediately to the DMV and work to resolve the problem.

In a similar way the Church expects you to wait to receive Communion until you come back into full communion. One way to do this is to see if it can be proved through the "courts" (marriage tribunal) that your former marriage, for some valid reason, could never produce an authentic marital bond when you said, "I do." If so, you may get an annulment and may choose to have your current civil marriage convalidated (brought to the level of a sacrament). If it can't be proved, however, the church must outwardly uphold the sanctity of your prior marriage as an unbreakable bond that images the union between Jesus and His Bride.

There's so much more, of course, so begin to read and research this topic on your own. Talk to an informed and faithful priest. Read *How to*

*Understand and Petition for Your Decree of Nullity* available at [rosesweet.com/store](http://rosesweet.com/store).

There are ways the church brings warm mercy and tenderness to balance the necessary upholding of justice. And be careful . . . many Catholics think they know all about annulments and they mistakenly avoid or reject what can be a beautiful healing process.

**Bible:** This is a great mystery, and I am speaking of Christ (the Bridegroom) and (His Bride) the Church. Eph 5

**Catechism:** The Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church. CCC 1395

## What is an annulment?

The formal term is “Declaration of Nullity” and ‘annulment’ has become the common phrase. It’s not to be confused with a civil annulment.

It doesn’t make your children illegitimate.

It doesn’t deny the love, affection, family ties and other good and necessary bonds (legal, financial, social, parental, et al) between you and your ex-spouse.

It doesn't deny that you had a valid civil marriage.

But it does declare—after careful scrutiny—that something serious was missing or in the way of *a true marriage bond* from forming on the wedding day.

According to the Catholic Church a valid, sacramental marriage can never be broken. If the marriage is authentic, it has been “caught up into” and become part of the unbreakable marriage bond between Christ with His Bride (all of us in His church). He never breaks His promise, He never leaves us. No divorce. Ever.

But (for serious reasons) some people just aren't capable of entering into a valid union. This should not be too difficult to grasp on a general basis: we understand that those who are already married, those who are clergy, or those who are still children, also are not "capable" of marriage.

And the church recognizes—with the same love of justice and desire for mercy as Jesus—that imperfect people enter what are called "attempted marriages." Despite good intent, something was seriously obstructive or missing that prevented the union from ever being able to rise to the level of a true marriage.

There was, as the Church says, a "defect of consent" and despite family, financial, social, sexual, and even parental bonds, there was no true marriage bond (as the Church understands authentic marriage). It can seem a jarring concept, but it makes sense when you stay open to the mind of the Church and have someone help you understand.

Maybe one spouse was married before and not free to marry again. Or one was grossly immature, underage, under grave fear or pressure to marry (shotgun weddings), severely addicted, or permanently refused to remain open to the gift of children. These are areas that do not reflect the free, total, faithful, fruitful love of the Bridegroom for His Bride and therefore do not reflect a valid marriage bond.

Some people think it is too easy to get an annulment. It is not. Some have said (including recent popes) there are "too many" annulments in our country. They are right!

Not that annulments are easy to get, but that too many people marry for the wrong reasons and with the wrong intent. Grace can certainly help us all, but far too many today fail to have the capacity for marriage as God intends.

*There is much more!* This is a complex issue because marriage is a serious issue. Most Catholics—including some clergy—haven't been well informed on the truth about marriage, much less about annulments, but we hope to help remedy that through our materials.

If you want to know more—and we hope you do—first, ask God to give you an open mind and heart.

**Bible:** Whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Matt 16: 18- 20

**Catechism:** . . . the Church, after an examination of the situation by the competent ecclesiastical tribunal, can declare the nullity of a marriage. CCC 1629

## How do I handle all this loneliness?

" Everybody has a hungry heart . . ." croons Bruce Springsteen, and he's right.

God made our hearts to hunger for Him but in His design, we are first emotionally fed by our parents, caretakers, siblings, and family. When we go off to school, friendships fill our hearts. Later, emotional needs get satisfied by work, romantic interests, spouses, and children. But the trouble starts when we stop there. These sources are meant to point us to God, not replace Him.

No human relationship is meant to fill the hunger that the heart has for God alone. If you have made a "god" out of being in love or being married, you will crumble every time you can't find or you lose that "love."

Human love is not bad, it's a gift from God, but it should bring us to a deeper understanding of how He loves us. Human love should catapult us into the heavens to find the Love that never fails, the Love that always satisfies.

It is a terrible cross to bear loneliness after divorce. Have a plan when loneliness hits: call a friend, bring a gift to someone, or do some good deed for another. Unite your sorrow with His loneliness on the cross. While your emotions are healing, remind your intellect and will that the loneliness you feel is truly—at its deepest core—a longing for the face of God. And He is

already right here, right now for you. In an even fuller way, He is the real, true, and substantial presence in the Eucharist. Go sit with Him.

**Bible:** God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God, and God in him. We loved Him, because He first loved us. 1 John 4:16, 19

**Catechism:** At every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek Him, to know Him, and to love Him with all his strength. CCC 1

### **Should I wait for reconciliation with my ex?**

If there's the smallest chance of reconciliation, always work on it, get some counseling, pray about it, and sacrifice for it.

If eventually it becomes clear that there will be no marital reconciliation, you can still be "reconciled" to a differently-lived-out love for him or her.

If you have no annulment, you'll still be married in the eyes of the Church and will need special graces and counsel to remain faithful to your vows. With God's grace, many divorced couples have come to forgive and love each other tenderly although they are no longer living as married.

Every situation is different because every marriage is different because every unique PERSON is different. Better to hope for it and work at it work at it "too long" than give up too easily. Don't let friends and family discourage you.

Sometimes the romantic ache you feel for the absent spouse is more than just about that person; the grief can include mourning the endless losses of what you'd hoped they would be for you in a million ways, what you'd always envisioned your marriage and family life would be. Like many, you may not be emotionally ready to so easily let go of all those life-long dreams.

"Love" needs to be redefined from the current culture's use; it's not so much a romantic feeling or passion, but a non-self-focused (disinterested)



act of the will to desire/do what is good and best for another. Q - What is the best for your ex? A - His or her salvation, not your unmet emotional needs.

So, allow time, God's grace, and your working with Him to heal your emotional longings. Your shared life may be over, but never, ever stop loving the other person as God loves him or her.

**Bible:** Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me. John 14:1

**Catechism:** The fruits of love are joy, peace, and mercy; love remains . . . disinterested and generous. CCC 1828- 1829

### **What if I believe I am still married in God's eyes?**

This can be a great sorrow.

When one spouse leaves, sometimes the other determines to remain faithful to the marriage vows regardless of the other's absence. Living a "married" life all by yourself is an extremely hard cross to bear but one that can bear much spiritual fruit, such as:

- Giving public example of authentic faithfulness to your children and the community
- Being a sign in the world of the faithfulness Christ has for each of us
- Creating an emotionally safe place for a spouse to return
- Cooperating with grace to work out your own salvation
- Being a witness of obedience to the Church teachings
- Uniting the loneliness with Christ's sufferings so that He can turn it into spiritual fruits

But there are other things to consider, such as:

- When staying "married" might be staying stuck in bitterness or fear of moving on

- Struggling to accept reality because of a disordered attachment to being married
- Staying stuck in victim-mode by continually referencing your “abandonment”
- Falling into pride by constantly calling the departing spouse the “adulterer”
- Falling into pride by constant praying for the other's salvation (one heartfelt prayer is enough for God!)
- Refusing to accept the authority of the Church Tribunal

A competent tribunal may have thoroughly investigated the marriage through the annulment process and found the union to be one where both parties gave it their best, but it could only reach the level of an “attempted marriage” (that was not valid). There is no shame in this.

This might infuriate and deeply grieve the spouse who didn't want a divorce and hoped for a good marriage. One should honestly ask if refusing to accept the Church’s decision comes from a rebellious spirit or simply the huge fear of "now what?" You may have given it your best, but a marriage takes two who are willing and able.

*Every situation is different. Every case calls for in-depth research, counseling, spiritual direction, gut-wrenching honesty, and a spirit open to God’s healing touch.*

**Bible:** Therefore, brothers, be all the more eager to make your call and election firm, for, in doing so, you will never stumble. For, in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you. 2 Peter 1:10-11

**Catechism:** It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life. CCC 1615

**When will I be free to date again?**

Well, let's ask instead: When will you be free to marry? Because "dating" is about finding a spouse, not using others to fill lonely weekends.

- Are you legally divorced? If not, you're still married.
- Have you received a Decree of Nullity from the Church Tribunal? If not, you're still married.
- Are you fully healed, mentally, emotionally, financially, sexually, and spiritually? If not, you're not ready.
- Are you open and ready in every way to enter a full, free, faithful, and fruitful marriage where you are a gift to another, not a burden?

If you are not ready to marry, you are not ready to date.

Sadly, we've reduced dating to a way of using other people: to feel better, to "find myself", to make sure we still "have it", to feel loved, to have sex again, to enjoy social settings, to quell loneliness, to show our ex we are still desirable, to not be the odd man out, or to find someone this time who can meet our needs. It's all about me! That selfish streak is the ruination of any relationship.

Before you even think about dating again, study Pope John Paul II's powerful and revolutionary look at how to love rightly: *Man and Woman He Created Them: a Theology of the Body* ([www.tobinstitute.org](http://www.tobinstitute.org)). Remarried couples face a 75% statistical chance of divorce. You obviously know that pain . . . don't you think you might take some time to learn how to do it right?

**Bible:** Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. Do not fret . . . Psalm 37:7

**Catechism:** The fruits of the Spirit (patience is one) are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory CCC 1830 – 1832

## **Do I really have to stay chaste at my age?**

So you were married and sexually active for years. It's not the middle ages anymore; so how can the Church realistically expect you to remain chaste?

Easy. Like a mother, she knows that for which your heart truly longs. She knows what will eventually hurt you and what will make you happy. And out of love for you she will NOT let you settle for less than the best!

But she also knows that, no matter your age, when you are stuck in an emotionally adolescent way of thinking about sex, you will not want to listen to her.

In our video series, we introduce you to the "Theology of the Body" a fresh, new way to look at old and timeless truth: sex outside the loving, faithful commitment of marriage is a way of using one another. After divorce we especially use it as a temporary balm and a boost to our broken egos. We use it to try to secure someone new, so we won't be alone. These are not the ways of love; these are the ways of using. It may feel good today, but it will hurt tomorrow. It always does.

Saving sex as that exclusive, special way of expressing life-long vows of faithfulness to one another with our bodies brings great satisfaction, deep trust, and authentic bonding. It's possible and so WORTH IT...ask the increasing millions of people who are now doing it God's way and are reaping the sweet and lasting benefits of it.

Doing the same old thing is sure to get you the same old results: high hopes and then broken hearts. The culture continues to lie to you, and if you're honest, you'll know it.

After divorce, you have a chance to reexamine the way you see everything, including the gift of our sexuality. Aren't you ready for a change? Aren't you ready for something deeper, higher, more beautiful, more authentic, and more LOVING? We hope you are, and we are ready to stand with you in your search for True Love.

**Bible:** Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed Himself over for her ... Ephesians 5:25

**Catechism:** In marriage, the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion . . . CCC 2360

### **Are there any good ones left?**

It may have been some time since your divorce and annulment. You've settled the court issues, gotten your finances stabilized, the kids are okay, and perhaps you've been dating for a while. Now there just don't seem to be any "good ones" left. Well, in a certain sense, you may be right.

After divorce, many people don't do the "work" necessary to heal and become whole. They stay stuck in old ways of thinking and "dating" (uh, sleeping together . . .) and are unsuited to enter an authentic, sacramental marriage. That's the reality of life.

Remember, though, that trying to "find someone" can devolve into a sense of appropriation or acquisition. A new spouse is not something you have the power to get. Of course you do have to be "actively available", but if you seek God first, he'll help you deal with whatever struggles you have.

You don't know what the future holds as far as remarriage, but you can know what He wants for you each day: to come to know Him more, love Him more, and surrender your heart and life to Him more fully each day.

The human soul was made FIRST to be united with God. In that way, everyone—married or single—is called into the "mystical marriage" with Christ. That is where our deepest longings will be satisfied. If this sounds too religious, boring, or otherwise unappealing, ask God to open your mind and heart so he can reveal himself more deeply to you. It will be the best prayer you ever make.

And remember . . . the best way to FIND a good one, is to BE a good one.

**Bible:** Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matt 6:34

**Catechism:** Read the section on THE VIRTUES that “Make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life.” CCC 1803 – 1845

## **I’m already remarried; now what?**

There are usually two areas that remarried Catholics will want to consider after a divorce and remarriage:

### *Having your new marriage convalidated in the Church*

If both of you were free to (re)marry in the Church, and did, no problem. However, you may have remarried outside the Church and now want to have your new marriage convalidated. The common term is “blessed” but convalidation is much more than a mere blessing; it is the exchange of vows according to the Church that makes it valid and elevates the marriage to a sacrament. Sacraments bring endless amounts of special and powerful graces that every married couple should have.

One or both of you may need to go through the annulment process first, even if one spouse is a non-Catholic. Most anytime that two adults say, “I do,” the Church assumes there is a valid marriage bond. These issues need to be cleared up. Don’t be afraid of the process. Go to our Annulment Guide for more help.

### *Dealing with blended family issues*

Step-parenting is a special challenge but can be a special blessing as well. Second marriages fail at an extremely high rate—even Catholic marriages—because of many issues. The primary problem? The new family may be child centered, not marriage centered. Many parents understandably but inappropriately put their children first in a second marriage. Additionally, if the marriage is not first Christ-centered, the

struggles will be even more difficult. Put Christ first, then the marriage, get good Catholic counseling/ coaching if needed.

**Bible:** And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you and your household will be saved." Acts 16:31

**Catechism:** Children owe their parents respect, gratitude, just obedience, and assistance. Filial respect fosters harmony in all of family life. CCC 2251

### **Where can I learn more about Catholic teachings in this area?**

So glad you asked! Most Catholics—even those with many years of parochial education—have never continued as adults in discovering the riches the Church has to offer. As a result, they still have child-like views or misunderstandings of the faith. And some, who were taught in the seventies through the nineties, may have been misled.

And then there are those “cradle Catholics” who have been led away into other faith communities by well-meaning friends or relatives.

Well, we want you all to “come home.”

We know that the fullest healing from divorce can come through deeply personal and spiritually powerful encounters with the person of Jesus Christ. The Son of God. Creator of the Universe. You and Him. One on one. He wants to console you, teach you, touch you, heal you, guide you, cleanse you, forgive you, strengthen you, and LOVE you.

And guess what these healing encounters with Him are called? You might remember them as “Outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace.”

That’s right . . . the Sacraments. Betcha didn’t know that!

If you're hungry for more of the Catholic Faith—and the riches she has to offer—try these faithful websites for CDs, DVDs and more:

[www.LighthouseCatholicMedia.com](http://www.LighthouseCatholicMedia.com) (Great resources for all)  
[www.Catholic.com](http://www.Catholic.com) (Catholic Answers)  
[www.ignatius.com](http://www.ignatius.com) (Catholic movies, books, bibles)

**Bible:** Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.  
Malachi 3:7

**Catechism:** . . . “the Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world's persecutions and God's consolations.” Here below she knows that she is in exile far from the Lord, and longs for the full coming of the Kingdom, when she will “be united in glory with her king.” CCC 769