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Help and Healing for Divorced Christians

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12 Steps to a More Joyful Life after Divorce

The end of your marriage has likely left a big hole in your life. Perhaps your spouse was abusive, and you know you're better off without him. Nevertheless, you're experiencing some big changes, some good and maybe others, not so much. Whatever the issues, your divorce recovery is a time of finding your new normal. Here are some ways to find joy in the process.

1. Pamper yourself.

Your life has probably changed dramatically since the divorce, both emotionally and physically. It's normal to cycle between feeling scared and feeling brave. Give yourself a pass for being confused. Take a nap, enjoy a soak in the tub, eat a little chocolate, drink a glass of champagne, listen to your favorite music ... whatever healthy activity soothes you.

2. Allow your friends and relations to help you.

Letting your family and friends know how to help you is a sign of maturity. If there was ever a time you need uplifting, it's now. Keep company with positive friends and avoid negative people. Be grateful for those who support you.

3. Consider seeing a personal counselor and/or joining a support group.

Find a counselor who can help bring perspective to your situation and assure you that you aren't losing your mind in this "crazytime" of divorce. Talking out your grief, anger, and other emotions to an impassioned party can be cathartic. Certified counselors can prescribe anti-depressants, if needed. A divorce support group, perhaps offered by a local church, can be a source of potential new friendships as well as a place to process your story.

4. Forgive yourself.

Even if the divorce is not your fault, you may have regrets about some of your behavior toward your now ex-spouse. Self-examination is good to a point. Bring your concerns before the Lord who wants to forgive you; all you have to do is accept that forgiveness.

5. Exercise.

Don't overdo the pampering! Drag yourself out of that funk and get those endorphins working. Exercising in a group will also help you feel connected to the world around you. Growing stronger physically can build your emotional strength, too.

6. Get your finances and legal affairs in order.

You may be in shock, but, as soon as you are able, take stock of your assets and responsibilities.

- Create a budget that includes retirement savings.
- If necessary, see a financial advisor.
- Update insurance policies, car registrations, bank account ownership, credit cards, utility bills, deeds and mortgage information.
- Update beneficiaries on insurance and other accounts.
- Write a new will.
- Update emergency contacts and be sure you retain access to your child's school records.
- If you've moved, give a forwarding address to your post office.

As challenging as these tasks may sound, accomplishing them will help you feel in more control of your life.

And now for the fun part:

- If possible, cut back on a few expenses in order to afford one special thing that is yours and yours alone. This may seem frivolous, but providing something lovely for yourself will give you a boost.

7 Celebrate.

Celebrating may be the first or furthest thing on your mind. You may not yet know the blessings that lie ahead, but you can celebrate your release from a difficult marriage and a new beginning. Do something that makes you smile. It may be as simple as going dancing with friends or as meaningful as hosting a divorce ceremony. As a healing ritual, this could be an opportunity to reclaim your power, your joy, and your freedom to create a new life. Ask a friend or pastor to help you plan the event, and invite friends and family who support you. Describe what you've learned through your marriage and divorce and share how you intend to live your life going forward. Allow attendees to add their words of encouragement. Allow yourself to be blessed.

8. Dream and stretch yourself.

What have you always dreamed of doing? What would it take to fulfill that dream, or at least a piece of it? Challenge yourself. Take up ballroom dancing. Go back to school. Travel to a place you've always dreamed of visiting. What hidden talent is waiting for you to discover? This is your chance to reinvent yourself.

9. Take your time to resume dating.

Healing needs to take place before you're ready to have a healthy relationship with someone new. Rushing will only delay your recovery work. When you feel ready, make a list of what you're looking for in those you date. Read it regularly. Keep true to what you have identified in your list. Knowing who you are and what you want is essential in moving forward.

10. Work toward forgiving your ex.

Forgiving your ex may be one of the most difficult tasks you'll ever face, but it's essential to your physical and emotional health. Know that forgiveness is a process and will probably take some time. Cycling between anger and forgiveness for a while is not unusual. Try identifying the positive things that have come out of your experience. Ask the Lord to soften your heart. Look forward to the day you discover the burden of hurt and anger has been lifted, providing space for love to come into your life once again.

11. Practice gratitude.

"How can I be grateful," you ask, "when I'm in a world of hurt?" Indeed, gratitude can be a challenge, and you may want to resist. If you pass up this step, though, you'll be missing many blessings in disguise ... ones that are not immediately apparent. Get yourself a journal, set fifteen minutes aside each day, and allow yourself to start small. Did something make you laugh? Did a driver let you in line? Did a flower catch your eye? Did someone give you a hug? As you practice awareness, more and more gratitude will seep into your soul, and you'll begin to feel lighter, more joyful.

12. Thankfulness follows gratitude.

You may wonder where God has been through all of your hurt and pain. Personally, it took me several years after my first husband left to understand that He is always right beside me. If I allow Him in, He will comfort me like no other. In Psalm 56:9, David, who was being hunted down by his mortal enemies, wrote, "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all of my tears in a bottle." God knows your sorrow better than anyone. He is on your side! Thank Him for the comfort and joy this knowledge brings you.