

God

I'm Getting Divorced. Why Won't My Church Help Me?

"I feel like they just said 'fight for your marriage' and have been silent."



By Eddie Kaufholz

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Eddie,

I am going through a divorce. It's not pretty, but it's also not overly dramatic and there's really no huge event that caused us to get to this place. It's just that after 11 years, my soon-to-be ex-wife and I are not in love, and are done. Anyhow, the church that I love has not been supportive of me even though I really feel like God is OK with my decision. I feel like they pretty much just said "fight for your marriage" and have been silent. I feel angry at them and could use whatever thoughts you have to resolve this tension.

Regards,
Marc

Marc, this is tough one, it really is. Because while I want you to feel supported at all times by your church, as a pastor I know that a divorcing congregant puts even the best leaders into murky waters. But before we get into that ...

I'm sorry your marriage ended. And don't worry, I'm not going to get all preachy about the vows you took and staying married, as it just doesn't feel like that would be helpful at this point. I'm simply going to say that I'm sorry you're in this position. As a pastor of mine used to say, "You know who really hates divorce? Divorced people." And he's right. Neither you nor your ex-wife were picturing this scenario as you went on your first date, stood on the altar or bought your first little home together. I'm sorry Marc, and I'm sorry for your ex-wife. Nobody wanted it to go down like this.

But it has. And now you're in the middle of the daunting task of separating that which was once indelibly fused. Furthermore, you're doing this without the support (you feel) of your church.

What Support Looks Like

I'd like to pose a question to you: *What would it look like for your church to fully support you in this time?*

I'm asking you to name what support would look like because, so often, when we're going through something particularly difficult, we get a sort of sadness fatigue. And during this time, we begin to grasp at straws and blame the people and things around us for a pain that's just not ending—and not anyone else's to own. Might this be happening to you?

Please hear me say this, Marc. You probably have a legitimate complaint with your church. Furthermore, they truly may not be supporting you, or worse, may be treating you less than kindly as you walk through a situation you never imagined you'd be in. But actually naming the ways in which you'd feel supported (or feel unsupported currently) will allow you to cut through the cloud of emotion, and maybe give you and your church some wisdom for how to best love you—and others like you.

As a pastor, I've got to say that knowing how the church can best be the church for folks in the midst of divorce is a difficult question for me. Here's why:

I feel like some people in a divorce are not just looking for spiritual guidance (hopefully the church can help with that) but also practical help. Some will ask for a referral to a good lawyer, financial assistance, even pastoral mediation between the soon-to-be ex-spouses. And while all of these things seem like decent ways the church could serve a clear need, I also feel like—and I'm just being honest here—I don't want to leverage any of the churches resources to help with divorce.

Strategically, if I'm going to choose what to do for divorced couples, I'm going to invest the time and money into preventative measures like great pre-marital classes, marriage enrichment opportunities and marriage rescue counseling. Is this the right strategy? Well, not fully, because the truth is there are people divorcing in our church. And while I can dislike that, ignoring it won't make it go away.

But am I condoning divorce by helping? Or is it simply being loving and merciful despite the circumstances? It's hard to know what's right, and I've oscillated greatly in how the church "should" respond, and I'm certain I've made mistakes in this area.

How the Church Should Support

In any event, my hope is that even if the church has no idea how to be champions for folks in the midst of a divorce, at least they'll do the following:

- 1:** They will provide pre-divorce counsel and be fully invested in helping marriages thrive.
- 2:** For the marriages that are beyond repair (even if the church disagrees that divorce is the right option) my hope is that the church will love during that season and, at a minimum, provide outlets for spiritual development and compassionate community.
- 3:** After the divorce is finalized, they'll provide opportunities for people to discover what went wrong in the marriage, and what could go right the next time around. For what it's worth, there's a group study called [DivorceCare](#) that folks in my church have been profoundly impacted by.
- 4:** They are doggedly pursuing Jesus, being malleable in how they're called to support divorcing folks in the congregation, and apologizing when they mess it up.

Marc, if your church was doing these things, would you feel supported? If they're not, might you be able to kindly help them learn how to care for future Marc's? I'd love to see you try. Because at the end of the day, you are the church and you can be the change you'd hope to see.

Finally, my prayer is that both you and your church would show extra measures of grace as it pertains to this issue. Neither one of you really knows how to handle this perfectly because, well, it's an imperfect situation. So I hope your church loves you, even if they're not quite sure how to help. And likewise, I hope you'll lean into your community and find some measure of support and comfort—even if it's not quite perfect.

Sorry again for your situation, Marc. Better days are ahead.

- Eddie

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