

## **Habits That Lead To Divorce**

Every married couple has exchanged vows which promise “til death do us part,” but for far too many marriages, their dreams of “forever” are crushed by divorce. According to government stats from the CDC, America averages one divorce every 36 seconds. That’s roughly 2,400 divorces each day, 16,800 divorces every week and 876,000 divorces per year.

So, how do we stop this epidemic of broken marriages? To bring it even closer to home, how should you protect your marriage? While nothing is foolproof, if you’ll avoid these common bad “habits,” you’ll be well on your way to beating the divorce statistics and creating a healthy and happy marriage that will endure through every season of life. If you believe your marriage might be heading for divorce, please do not lose hope!

### ***Constant Criticism***

When you get a warning light on your car’s dashboard, it means there’s something wrong under the hood that needs immediate attention. One of the biggest “warning lights” in a marriage is a tone of constant criticism. When a husband and wife start being each other’s biggest critics instead of the biggest encouragers and when they start focusing only on the negative instead of the positive, it creates a downward spiral that often leads to divorce (Proverbs 27:15).

### ***Dividing Everything Into “His” And “Hers”***

This habit is something many couples do as soon as they get married, but they don’t realize they’re just preparing themselves for divorce. When a husband and wife have separate bank accounts, separate hobbies, separate friends, and separate dreams, they’re running the risk of creating completely separate lives. Marriage is about combining; divorce is about dividing. The more you can share together, the stronger your marriage will be. When God made man and woman “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), it meant that they not only have a sexual bond, but that they should experience the elements of their lives together.

### ***Putting The Marriage “On Hold” While You’re Raising Your Kids***

This is the reason there’s an epidemic of divorce among couples who have been married for 20 years or more. I’ve seen too many marriages fall apart because two well-meaning people put so much focus on their kids that they forgot to keep investing in the marriage. Some couples reduce their relationship to a partnership in co-parenting, and when the kids finally grow up, they discover that they have created an empty nest and an empty marriage. Give your children the gift that comes from seeing their parents in a loving, thriving marriage. Model the kind of marriage that will make your kids excited to be married someday. For the husband (and wife too), live out the precept of Proverbs 5:18: “Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.”

### ***Giving Each Other Your “Leftovers”***

This might be the most common (and one of the most dangerous) habits on the list. Some couples have what I call a “cable company marriage.” Have you ever noticed how cable TV companies seem to give you their best deals at the beginning of the relationship but then after the “introductory period” ends, they give you as little as possible to keep you around? Some married couples were great at giving their best at the beginning of the relationship, but as time goes on, they start giving the leftovers. Strive to keep giving your best to each other. Put your husband or your wife first, not your children, best friends, or career. Grow deeper in your love, your respect, and your friendship through all the seasons of marriage. When you read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, you see the description of a deep, mature love — not a “leftover” given to a spouse who deserves better.

### ***Holding Grudges And “Keeping Score”***

This habit is toxic and when it happens, neither spouse is going to have peace or happiness. If you’ve been married longer than 15 minutes, chances are good that your spouse has done something to offend you and you’ve done something to offend him/her. When our words or actions cause harm, we need to be quick to admit fault and seek forgiveness. When your spouse has wronged you, you need to offer grace quickly so that trust can start being rebuilt and there’s no room for bitterness to take root in your heart. Don’t use past hurts as ammunition in arguments. Let grace flow freely in your marriage (Ephesians 4:31-32). No marriage can survive without it.

### ***Trusting Your “Feelings” More Than Your Commitments***

Feelings are the worst to trust to advise choices in your marriage. There are going to be days when you might not “feel” like being married, but feelings are fickle and they were never intended to be our primary advisor in major decisions. Jeremiah wrote, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). “Feelings” often lead people into adultery. The healthiest couples have discovered that love is a commitment; not just a feeling. It is a vow “until death do us part.” Their commitment to each other perseveres regardless of what they’re feeling. The strength of that commitment allows them to have a deeper intimacy, a stronger connection and a happier marriage.

### ***Making Decisions Without Consulting Your Spouse***

This habit occurs when pride replaces thoughtfulness in the relationship. Our pride can often convince us that we don’t have to answer to anyone, and we should be able to make decisions without consulting anyone. Pride has been the downfall of so many marriages. Proverbs 16:18 warns, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” It could be the downfall of nations, individuals, or of marriages. The healthiest couples have learned that every decision they make as individuals will have some level of impact on each other, so they respectfully and thoughtfully consult each other in every decision.

### ***Trying To Change Each Other***

This habit frustrates both spouses, but doesn't help either one of them. When you try to "change" your spouse, you will both end up frustrated. As you've probably learned already, you can't change each other. The only part of the marriage you have the power to change is the part you see when you look in the mirror — and God intended that part to be changed by the "perfect law of liberty" (Romans 1:16; James 1:25). Be willing to change your responses to your spouse's behavior. Look for ways to love and serve each other even when you have differences of perspective or preference. You'll both probably end up "changing" for the better in the process.

### ***Planning An Exit Strategy***

This is the biggest single step toward an eventual divorce. The healthiest couples have removed the "D-Word" (Divorce) from their vocabularies. When we threaten divorce or when we silently start fantasizing about life with someone new, we're ripping apart the foundation of the marriage — and God hates it (Malachi 2:16). Forget about divorce! The couples who make it work aren't the ones who never had a reason to get divorced; they're simply the ones whose commitment to each other was always bigger than their differences and flaws.

### ***Keeping Secrets From Your Spouse***

In marriage, secrets are as dangerous as lies, and we shouldn't be lying to one another (Colossians 3:9). Marriage must be built on a foundation of total transparency and trust. You must prioritize trust and transparency in the marriage ahead of your own person privacy. Unless you're planning a surprise party or hiding a holiday gift, there are no places for secrets in marriage. Anytime you're having a conversation, making a purchase, sending a text message, doing an internet search, or doing anything else you hope your spouse never finds out about, your secrecy is slowly killing your marriage.

### ***Developing An Emotional Affair***

Emotional infidelity refers to behavior that one partner engages in that fosters emotional intimacy in the here-and-now with someone else, and sometimes promotes the possibility of sexual intimacy in the future. These types of affairs are increasingly common. Around 45% of men and 35% of women have admitted to having some sort of emotional affair! About 88% of women said that they were more concerned about their partners being engaged in an emotional affair than a physical one. Emotional affairs often begin innocently with a natural connection you share with someone at work, on social media, in a social circle, at the gym, or at church, but lines can be quickly crossed. Learn to possess that "vessel in sanctification and honor" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4).

## ***Seeing Porn Or Erotic Romance Novels As “Harmless Entertainment”***

Porn is everywhere, and it's having a devastating impact on marriages. When you're acting out sexual fantasy apart from your spouse, it's an act of mental infidelity. All true intimacy and all infidelity begins in the mind; not in the bedroom. If your eyes and your thoughts are wandering away from your spouse, then your heart is going to follow (Matthew 5:28). Don't just be physically monogamous — be mentally monogamous.

### ***Selfishness***

This habit is the number one cause of divorce. We are all selfish by nature, but a marriage can only work when we put our selfishness aside and put the needs of our spouse ahead of our own needs (Philippians 2:3-4). When both spouses are willingly to selflessly love and serve each other in this way, the marriage will thrive. The hard part is that you must be willing to go first and be selfless even in those moments when he/she is not reciprocating. Your actions might turn the tide. Couples who take each other for granted, leaving one or both parties feeling undervalued in the relationship, are doomed. Be a thermostat, not a thermometer. A thermometer always adjusts to the climate in a room, but a thermostat changes the climate in the room. Be the change. You probably have more influence than you think!

Adapted from Dave Willis