



## How We Help With Marriage Conflict

We believe that marriage is a life-long, exclusive, covenant relationship between one man and one woman instituted by God.<sup>1</sup> He designed it to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give cohesiveness to society in general. Strong marriages produce stable and healthy families. Marriage is not to be entered into lightly nor carelessly dissolved.<sup>2</sup> Even spouses who separate remain married until the day a civil court issues a Divorce Decree and should refrain from dating or engaging in any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

We do, however, recognize that many married couples struggle with serious conflict that causes them great distress and harm. Under some circumstances, God permits a believer to seek a divorce. We believe divorce is permissible when a spouse has been sexually involved with a person outside the marriage<sup>3</sup> or when an unbelieving spouse abandons the marriage.<sup>4</sup> Even when divorce is permissible, however, it is never required.<sup>5</sup> An offended spouse may choose to imitate God's love by offering their spouse the same grace and mercy God has extended to them.<sup>6</sup> We believe God and the resources He provides are always more than sufficient to bring healing and reconciliation to any marriage.

The Bible is clear that people and relationships are God's top priorities. He favors forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration of the marriage, even if grounds for divorce exist.<sup>7</sup> Even if full reconciliation and restoration do not occur, God wants spouses to see their part in the conflict and to take steps to live at peace.<sup>8</sup> This is for their good and is important for both current and future relationships.

Married couples cannot effectively address relational issues and remain genuinely open to healing and reconciliation if they are asked to try to resolve financial and other family issues at the same time. For this reason, we follow a two-step mediated approach for navigating marital disputes and conflicts. The first step focuses on relational issues, during which spouses are encouraged to, among other things, recognize and accept responsibility for their individual contributions to their situation and are urged to take unilateral steps toward reconciliation.<sup>9</sup> The conduct, attitudes and issues that produced conflict are discussed, as are the importance of confession and forgiveness in the lives of Christians who have committed themselves to one another in marriage. If full reconciliation does not occur, we move to the second step which focuses on the resolution of outstanding family and financial issues, including those related to support, property and children. Because we follow this two-step mediation approach in marriage cases, all marriage mediations with PeacePoint involve at least two mediation meetings.

This two-step approach allows couples to effectively prepare for and mediate all aspects of their situation. By focusing on relational issues during the first step, the second step can sometimes be eliminated entirely. Even when it is necessary to move to the second step, couples who have worked to address their relational issues first are better able to resolve any remaining issues in a cooperative rather than adversarial manner.<sup>10</sup>

As is the case in any mediation, the mediator is not a legal representative of any party and has no fiduciary duty to any party. The mediator cannot and will not advise the parties regarding the legal effect or binding nature of any commitment made or resolution reached during the mediation. This applies to mediators who are lawyers as well as non-lawyers. The parties must consult with independent counsel of their choosing regarding the legal effect or binding nature of any commitment made or resolution reached during the mediation or for the preparation of legally binding agreements.

1 Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:16.

2 Malachi 2:16

3 Matthew 5:31-32

4 1 Corinthians 7:12-16

5 Hosea 3:1

6 Ephesians 5:1-2

7 Luke 17:3-4.

8 Matthew 7:3-5

9 Matthew 5:23-24

10 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Philippians 2:1-5.