

## **MARRIAGE MEDIATION MINISTRY**

### **PURPOSE STATEMENT**

One of the foremost purposes of a marriage mediation ministry is to deliver the Word of God. Educating believers and unbelievers about God's Design for Marriage identifies God's simple template for how marriages can work successfully without the risk of separation or divorce. Everything is possible through God. Numbers 23:19; Matthew 19:26; and Mark 9:23; 14:36. This scriptural principle applies equally to each couple's opportunity to have a wonderful marriage as God intends.

In addition to being a Christian, I am an attorney. An attorney practicing family law and having a marriage ministry in the same office is very unusual and, for some, very peculiar. While there are many Christian attorneys helping individuals become legally separated and divorced and using the adversary system with custody disputes and other family issues, it is refreshing for many people to discover there is another alternative when they originally walk in the door seeking legal services which would eventually result in a divorce. What can happen if the attorney is guided by Biblical principles?

Unfortunately, many pastors throw their hands in the air when it comes to parishioners having marital difficulties. The vast majority of pastors in this country consider there to be two Biblical grounds for divorce including sexual immorality under Matthew 5:32 and abandonment by an unbeliever under 1 Corinthians 7:15. The vast majority of pastors also believe a Biblical divorce can be obtained when there is physical

abuse even though they have no scripture to support such a position<sup>1</sup>. Culturally, our country has turned from a Bible-based morality such that many couples now married enter the covenant relationship with the belief that, if things do not work out, they can simply get a divorce.

In the marriage mediation ministry, we follow the Biblical principle that God considers marriage to be indissoluble except by death of one of the spouses<sup>2</sup>. Matthew 19:6-9. Few denominations adopt that view. The Roman Catholic Church follows that principle under its Canon law<sup>3</sup> but offers another avenue to skirt around domestic difficulties through a tribunal decree of a nullity based on lack of form or lack of consent. Either can serve as a basis to nullify the validity of the marriage by either examining the intent of the parties at the time of the marriage or whether, for example, the marriage ceremony was not performed in a Catholic church. These “escapes” are more commonly known as a religious annulment. Other denominations, avoid strict adherence to Biblical principles related to marriage and permit divorce. One might question whether that type of church is truly the bride acceptable to Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> The theories of pastors who support a Biblical divorce on this basis speculate that God would not want an abuse victim to continue being subjected to abuse. I would agree; however, divorce is not necessarily the answer. Despite the attitude of feminists that men who are physically and/or emotionally abusive can never be cured, the use of appropriate boundaries are scripturally sanctioned and one must have faith that God can do anything including healing an “abuser.”

<sup>2</sup> Arguments to the contrary are based on Jeremiah 3:6-8 where God divorces Israel; Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 are commonly misinterpreted. The distinction between the Greek words of pornea and moicheia is ignored; and 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 where a believer allows an unbelieving spouse to leave the marital home. A thorough discussion on the various theological arguments on whether there are Biblical grounds for divorce is more fully addressed in my book entitled, *God’s Design for Marriage*.

<sup>3</sup> See Canon 1057.

As a result of the growing unpopularity of marriage, eleven (11) jurisdictions<sup>4</sup> including Maryland have adopted legislation sanctioning domestic partnerships as an accepted model of the family unit. This allows some of the benefits of marriage to heterosexual and homosexual individuals who do not want to be married or cannot legally become married. Civil unions are growing in government support as well as same-sex marriage with Maryland being the most recent state legalizing same-sex marriage, now joining the ranks of Massachusetts, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New York and the District of Columbia. Common-law marriage remains a matter of contract rights in Alabama, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah and Texas. It is quite apparent the trend followed by our state governments is to now endorse fornication and the propagation of a different type of family unit without the covenant marriage with God.

Statistically a growing number of “partners” are in domestic partnerships as opposed to marriage. Their children are being raised within that model of the family unit. The percentage of children born out of wedlock has rising and is now 41% overall. 53% of children now born to women under 30 years of age are born out of wedlock. *Time Magazine, “The Curious Capitalist” by Rana Foroohar (March 12, 2012).* There is tremendous turmoil in the lives of children born out of wedlock since it is not unusual for a single parent to have three partners over the course of five years and multiple children with different partners. These children are statistically are more likely to do without marriage when they become adults. The trend is very clear that non-Biblical principles are guiding the majority of childbearing relationships.

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<sup>4</sup> Maryland adopted this legislation on 1 July 2008. Other states include California, Nevada, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, Oregon, Wisconsin and Washington. The District of Columbia is included among the eleven (11) jurisdictions referenced.

As time goes on, as governments continue to authorize non-Biblical family units, and as the culture accepts without question a preference against covenant marriage, the family unit envisioned and encouraged by God finds acceptance in fewer and fewer numbers as years go by. The eventual result of this trend will eventually be a near total absence of Christ in societal mores. In other words, the vast majority of residents in the United States will be either unbelievers or believers who have chosen simply not to follow God's will related to marriage.

Christians must strive to have this trend broken in some fashion. Marriage Miracles as a marriage mediation ministry has as its secondary purpose to end the current trend and to encourage all couples to follow God's Design for Marriage. Therefore, this second purpose can be defined comfortably as providing an alternative to current cultural trends and current cultural values related to marriage.

Through marriage mediation ministries, couples can be equipped with not only an understanding of God's Design for Marriage, but can also be provided multiple possibilities for a **support structure** in a Christian marriage. Such a support structure can help insulate a couple for fulfillment of the traditional marriage vow "until death do we part". One of the main support structures currently encouraged in the marriage mediation ministry is for both husband and wife to have their own **accountability partners**. An accountability partner is a same-gender associate soundly grounded in the Word of God who is available 24/7 to support the marriage no matter what difficulties arise. An additional support structure are **marriage mentors**, older Christian couples who have experienced the ups and downs of marriage and can serve as encouragers through difficult times meeting with the couple or each spouse individually. In Marriage Miracles, it is suggested the couple come in for an **annual check-up** a year after the last mediation session just to make sure they are still on track with God's Design for

Marriage. An alternative support structure also suggested is for the couple to attend a ***weekend marriage seminar*** in lieu of the couple coming into the office for a marriage check-up. Marriage Miracles does ***follow-up*** with each couple on a periodic basis to not only determine whether the couple is still on track with God's Design for Marriage but also to offer assistance, support and emergency care. There is no coincidence that some of our calls on follow-up come at a time only God knows would be beneficial or essential for a couple. One of the more important support structures includes ***the pastor and the church*** the couple attends on a regular basis. If the pastor does not have a belief in the inerrant Word of God related to marriage principles contained within the Bible, the couple is more likely to fail. Not only would it benefit pastors to be educated in the marriage mediation process but also pastors can be incredibly effective by utilizing church discipline under Matthew 18:15-17. Rarely in practice has this writer found a pastor willing to use this most valuable three-pronged tool provided by God to assist a couple encountering marriage difficulties. In summary, the third purpose of any marriage mediation ministry should be to equip couples with a support structure for a Christian marriage.

By fulfilling these three purposes of a marriage mediation ministry, not only will our nation be strengthened but also the positive changes through a spirit-led marriage ministry will result in glorifying God.

While glorifying God is, therefore, the overall main purpose of a marriage mediation ministry, that overall purpose is unlikely to be fulfilled unless the three underlying purposes are fulfilled, delivering the Word, providing a Biblical based alternative to cultural trends for family units, and provided spiritually sound support structures for married couples.

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