

ONE

It Never Occurred to Us

Brad and Anna had a happy marriage. They were both devout believers in Jesus, fell madly in love, and married soon after college graduation. In time, they began having children, were active in their church, and to all appearances seemed to have a peaceful, happy family.

But something dark lurked in the shadows. Brad had an addiction to porn that he couldn't shake. Anna didn't even learn of it until after they were married. Sometimes Brad would talk about it with Anna, but shame kept his struggles mostly

secretive. Brad began to lose his resolve to fight temptation and slowly sank even further.

Throughout their marriage, Anna expressed her support. She prayed for Brad and held him accountable when he asked. She cried to God on his behalf but felt powerless to help him. She urged him to see a counselor, but Brad was a private guy and went to the counselor only a couple times. He began to lie, telling Anna he was doing better. In actuality, his thought life grew darker and eventually he had his first affair with a co-worker.

Brad loved the Lord, but when the affair started he began to feel more distant than ever from Christ. He felt trapped. That's when he signed onto a dating app and met a woman he really fell for. The second affair quickly became serious, and Brad's heart toward Anna grew cold.

By the time Anna knew Brad was in a serious affair, it was too late. Brad pulled away from their church, divorced Anna, left her with the kids, and remarried.



Unfortunately, stories like Brad and Anna's—believers who end in divorce—are painfully too common. What goes wrong? What could they have done differently? Are we missing something? How can we help Christian couples in crisis? What tools can we give to help them preserve and heal their marriage?

Questions such as these have moved me to write this book. Jesus has given us a brilliant way to handle conflict in marriage, and almost nobody knows about it. Almost nobody uses it, but I really want you to see and consider it. Over the years, I've watched in pained silence at Christian marriages crashing on the rocks, wishing I had a way to give them the message of this book.

That's why I believe the Lord has prompted me to condense this message to writing. I hope it helps the Brads and Annas in the church whose marriages are floundering. I want to show how marriages can

be healed by following the wisdom of Jesus—even if the path appears counterintuitive on the surface. Jesus gave us a way to pursue marital reconciliation that is clear, wise, and transformative.

I want your marriage preserved, thriving, fulfilling, and fruitful. When our marriages are happy and healthy, our children have the best opportunity to become fruitful contributors to both church and society. My soul longs for the health of your home!

When sin is hurting a marriage, healing comes through confession of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and the cleansing of Christ's blood. But where there's no confession or change, the hurt remains unresolved. Unfortunately, some Christian couples have come to live with unresolved sin in their relationship and don't know their way forward.

Some spouses feel **STUCK** because they see their spouse's sinful behavior and resistance to repent, and feel powerless to do anything about it. I'm writing this book, however, to say that you're *not* **STUCK**. Jesus has given you a way forward.

By now, you're probably wondering what teaching of Jesus I have in view. When did Jesus address the right way to handle conflicts and rifts in Christian marriages? Thank you for asking. I invite you to apply the following words of Jesus to marital reconciliation:

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Matt 18:15-17

If you're married to a believer, then your spouse is also your brother or sister in Christ, and this passage applies to your marriage. This is the passage we're going to underscore repeatedly throughout this book.

In our marriage example, Brad was Anna's brother in Christ, and by viewing porn he was sinning against his wife. But Anna never actually registered the thought that her husband was *sinning against her*. She realized he was struggling with temptation, but she never formulated the thought, *My husband is sinning against me. And as my brother in Christ, I must go to him and tell him his fault*. She just prayed and hoped for a change.

It never even *occurred* to Anna that Matthew 18 was a fitting way to fight for her marriage, which is why she had never accessed Christ's powerful gift in this passage.

Had Anna known the steps of Matthew 18:15-17 were applicable to her marriage, she could have gone to Brad with this passage in hand. Had she done so early on, when Brad's heart was still tender and responsive toward the Lord, and told him that he was sinning against her by viewing porn, it's possible he would have responded to her appeal and sought the help he needed to overcome. Jesus'

pathway to healing and reconciliation could have won the day.

I'm saying it boldly and plainly: Matthew 18:15-17 applies to marriages where both spouses are believers in Christ. In those verses, Jesus provided our marriages with the advice we need to cleanse our homes of destructive sins and see our marriages restored to health. Some may consider this message controversial; others may think it dangerous or excessively confrontational. But I'm persuaded it's biblical, peaceable, and wise.

Let's ask ourselves this question: Why is Matthew 18:15-17 followed so sparingly in the church of Jesus Christ? How often have you even heard of believers and churches invoking the three steps Jesus gave us in this passage? Do we think His way lacked wisdom? Do we try to outthink Jesus and suppose His words don't apply to *our* crisis? Why have we often missed, shelved, neglected, or dismissed Jesus' counsel here?

We neglect this to our own hurt.

God Honors Obedience

I'm calling on all disciples of Jesus to believe and obey His words in Matthew 18:15-17. The Holy Spirit is ready to give us the courage and humility we need for this. If we'll just do His word, He'll honor us.

God honors obedience.

Let me illustrate that truth from a Bible story. God commanded all the men of Israel to leave their homes three times a year and travel to Jerusalem to commemorate the three annual feasts. And God knew they'd be tempted to think, *We can't do that because, if we leave our homes three times a year, our enemies will observe our routines and they'll invade our homes while we're gone to Jerusalem. We would be leaving our wives, children, and livestock vulnerable to attack.* So God assured them in so many words, "If you'll obey Me and make pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year, I'll personally see to it that none of your enemies attack your homes while you're gone" (see Exod 34:23-24). God was committed to honoring their obedience.

We're often tempted with similar thoughts. At times, we're tempted to think obedience to God will render us exposed and susceptible to misfortune. This is especially true in the case of Matthew 18:15-17. Our natural minds will tell us things like, "Using Matthew 18:15-17 right now would be the worst way to try to resolve the troubles in my marriage. If I go about it that way, the fallout will be disastrous."

But even when obedience appears ludicrous, faith obeys Jesus. And God always honors faith-motivated obedience. As a reminder, here's what Jesus said about our obedience:

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. Matt 7:24-25

Believe and obey! And God will honor you.

Following Jesus' way in relational reconciliation doesn't automatically mean that every marriage will be saved—because He honors the will of those who refuse His wisdom. But it gives your marriage the best chance of succeeding, and you'll enjoy the rewards of obedience.

As we apply Matthew 18 to Christian marriages, you may read some ideas you've not considered before. Examine the Scriptures presented, therefore, ask the Holy Spirit for understanding, and consider how Jesus would have us respond.

What are some unique ideas to look for in this book?

- You'll be shown a way for resolving crisis in Christian marriages that, to my knowledge, is not in writing elsewhere.
- You'll discover practical guidance for spouses who feel **STUCK** because of their spouse's sinful choices.

- You'll gain practical tools for helping Christian marriages in crisis. .

This is a quick read—take it all the way to the end!