**10 ways to alienate and drive divorced/single again people away from your church**

by Vicky Legge, [His Heart Ministry Training](http://www.hisheartministrytraining.com.au/blog/10-ways-to-alienate-and-drive-divorcedsingle-again-people-away-from-your-church/), AU

I was a church shopping stranger to most people. The preacher casually remarked, ‘Christians never divorce,’ as part of his sermon illustration. The comment was a dagger to my heart. This expression of speech was happening to me as I sat in the pew. The words lanced my pain as a newly divorced Christian trying to find my way back to God and reconnect with His people. My grief, my loss, my rejection, my anger flooded out in wails, shaking my body. To stifle the noise I thrust my head between my knees, my shoulders convulsing as each sob muffled into my jean leg. No-one reached out to me. At the end of the service I left alone, just as I had come, my pain etched in my face and still leaking silent tears.

This memory is one of my reasons to try to help churches improve how they care for divorced and single again people. Here’s my list of what to do if you want to alienate and drive divorced and single again people out of church, in no particular order – I just wanted to number them:

1. Teach divorce is an unforgivable sin and to remarry is to commit adultery. I know women who stayed in abusive marriages because they were taught divorce is an unforgiveable sin and did not wish to commit one. Others have left the church to remarry.
2. Deny single again people leadership.
3. Ignore the grief caused by the end of relationship and definitely don’t offer counselling. In the death of the relationship there are emotions from loss and grief with no ritual to help process them, and many times stigma instead of support. There may be the added heart break of rejection by the person who was supposed to love ‘till death do us part’ and possibly a betrayal of trust in need of healing.
4. Ignore the person’s practical needs. There is a learning process to take over jobs done by the partner and sometimes practical help is required. Often single parents are forced to move to cheaper accommodation and could use some help to pack and load.
5. Don’t rebuild the person’s identity or self-esteem. Don’t teach how worth is found in God alone, not in how others see you.
6. Promote couples and family as the way of God and being single only as a stage before marriage. Never talk about Biblical single role models like Paul and Jesus.
7. Never mention a person is whole as a single person. Instead refer to spouses as other halves implying a single person is less than complete.
8. Remain unaware of the emotional, mental, physical, social, spiritual and other needs of the person, as the end of a relationship affects all areas of health. I lost my job with the loss of my marriage as we ran a business together.
9. Don’t have any resources or referrals to help the person if you can’t or won’t come alongside them.
10. Always give examples in sermons about family life, and how the teaching applies to couples.

**What would Jesus do?**

Isaiah says of Jesus, ‘*He won’t brush aside the bruised and the hurt and he won’t disregard the small and insignificant, but he’ll steadily and firmly set things right.’ (Isaiah 42:3 The Message)*

Many, many times in the Bible, God exhorts His people to look after the widows and orphans and makes specific promises to help them. Widows include ‘those lacking a husband. ’1 See post [**God holds a special place for the single parent – so should the church**](http://www.hisheartministrytraining.com.au/blog/god-holds-a-special-place-for-the-single-parent-so-should-the-church/)

**How should His church do this to welcome and support divorced/single again people?**

Reverse the above 10 ways.

For numbers 3-10 I’m sure you get the picture of how to reverse them to create a positive inclusive and supportive environment for single again/divorced people.

Numbers 1 and 2 may a little harder as there are theological understandings at play. It’s good to research and have some knowledge of the differing views on this, and know where you stand. I just googled, ‘is divorce a sin?’ or can ‘can divorced people remarry?’ and got a wide variety of responses.

If you are interested in my understanding, you can read ‘Topic 29 What the church and Bible say about divorce’ from my book ‘New Life in the Mourning’ by [clicking here](http://www.hisheartministrytraining.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Topic-29-What-the-church-and-Bible-say-about-divorce.pdf).  My overarching view is,

*‘We need to look at the whole story of the Bible and not just focus on a few verses. Yes, God hates sin but his overall message is about our relationship with God, God’s grace, love and forgiveness through Jesus, his Son. The Bible talks about compassion, not condemnation. Our sins were forgiven two thousand years ago.’ p193*

Here’s my summary on the topic;

*‘God invented the union of marriage and the Bible upholds it as the ideal. The breaking of the marriage union is a sin. It may happen long before separation and divorce occur, and it may be broken by a partner’s abuse or infidelity rather than when one person leaves the marriage. God forgives all sin. Grace is bigger than sin.’ p199*

You may disagree with my theological conclusion but please be gentle in your disagreement.

**Putting legs on it**

1. Evaluate your church on the welcome and inclusion of divorced and single again people. What steps can you individually and as church take to improve this?
2. How can you improve your knowledge and understanding of the theology of divorce? There are some resources below and you can subscribe to His Heart Ministry Training for a monthly newsletter and other bonus material by [clicking here](http://eepurl.com/ccSufj). You will receive a self-care pack as a thank you.

**Resources**

New Life in the Mourning: website for those experiencing the end of a relationship: [www.newlifeinthemourning.com](http://newlifeinthemourning.com.au/)

New Life in the Mourning Book for those experiencing the end of a relationship and pastors/counsellors. *“This is a useful volume for pastors to have on hand both for their own understanding of the issues and for counselling newly-single people.”* Dr Vanessa Chant, Head of Counselling, Tabor College, Sydney and Dr Barry Chant Author and teacher, Founding president, Tabor College.

*For hard copy* [*click here*](http://www.hisheartministrytraining.com.au/product/new-life-in-the-mourning/)

*For ebook* [*click here*](https://www.amazon.com.au/New-Life-Mourning-Vicky-Legge-ebook/dp/B004UAZ218)

For equipping: <http://www.hisheartministrytraining.com.au/new-life-in-the-mourning/> (page will be updated soon)

*Theological Resources*

Christianity today – [Directions: you’re divorced can you remarry?](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/october4/9tb082.html)

**Biblical view on divorce (grace)**

Jay E Adams. Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible. US: Zondervan, 1980.

Ken Crispin. Divorce: The Unforgiveable Sin. Australia: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988.

Craig S Keener. And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament. US: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991.

**Biblical view on divorce (literal)**

Andrew Cornes. Questions About Divorce and Remarriage. UK: Monarch Books, 1998.

**Reconciliation**

Gary Chapman. Hope for the Separated: Wounded Marriages Can Be Healed. US: Moody Press,1996.

**References**

1. Strong, J. (1996) The new Strong’s exhaustive concordance of the Bible. Thomas Nelson Inc, USA
2. Legge, V (2010) New Life in the Mourning. Sid Harta Publishers, Australia, p 193 and 199

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