

DIVORCE *Care*®



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CHURCH INITIATIVE: PROVIDING HELP FOR HURTING PEOPLE

Church Initiative, DivorceCare's parent ministry, offers other support group resources to help people through life's challenges. GriefShare is a grief recovery program to help people grieving the death of a loved one. DivorceCare for Kids is a 13-week program for children of separation or divorce to learn how to manage their emotions, communicate with their parents, and find hope in the confusion. To learn more, use the contact information above. We'd love to hear from you!

Welcome

It may not have been an easy decision to join this DivorceCare group. But stick with it, and you'll be glad you did. And know that we're here to walk alongside you during what may be the hardest situation you've ever faced.

In this group, you'll discover how helpful it is to be around people who understand what you're going through. You'll also hear new information and advice that can help you heal from your separation or divorce. In fact, you'll hear things that can help you put all the pieces of your life back together.

We're sure you have more questions about the group. And your group leader will be glad to answer them. But, in the spirit of making just one thing in your life a bit easier, here are answers to some of the most common questions new group members have:

Q: What is DivorceCare?

A: In the coming weeks, you'll become part of a support group (one of thousands meeting around the world) where people find healing and hope after a marriage breakup. You'll be encouraged along the way by people who have been where you are. And you'll learn how to deal with your emotions and stresses and will gain tools for forward movement and health in your life.

Q: It's my first time at DivorceCare. What's going to happen?

A: Each week you'll view a video seminar on a divorce-related topic. The videos feature respected counselors and teachers who offer insights on how to handle the challenges you're facing. You'll also hear from people who've gone through a marriage breakup themselves—they share what has helped them. After the video, you'll discuss the concepts on the video and how they apply to you. Your DivorceCare leader will moderate the discussion time.

Q: I'm very nervous about being here. Is this normal?

A: You're not the only one feeling this way! Most people in your group were likely nervous the first time they came. We encourage you to commit to attending for at least three weeks; that will give you time to make a good decision about whether this group will help you. Other people have said that the support, resources, and healing found in DivorceCare far outweighed their initial anxieties.

Q: Will I have to talk during the group?

A: The decision to share is yours. You will benefit by listening to the videos and the discussion. Your group facilitator will encourage you to share when you are ready, because talking through your struggles and growth is instrumental in your healing.

Q: Why do I need this workbook?

A: The workbook is an invaluable part of your growth and healing process. You'll use the video outline to take notes during the videos. Then, during the week, you'll find short, daily exercises to help you sort through your emotions, deal with your personal situation, and find answers to your questions. Many participants also use their workbooks as a way to see how much they've healed and grown throughout the 13 weeks.

Q: I'm not a Christian. Will DivorceCare still help me?

A: Yes. People from all belief systems (and people who do not practice a faith) tell us that even though they are not Christians, they have found their DivorceCare groups to be wonderfully beneficial. That's because the courses are filled with practical tips on how to recover from the pain of divorce. So even if you practice another faith, or don't have any faith at all, you'll get a lot of helpful advice.

Access your free resources

HELP & DIRECTION
WHEN YOU NEED THEM

[DIVORCECARE.ORG/MY](https://divorcecare.org/my)



Free online help from DivorceCare



View the DivorceCare session videos

Watch again or catch up on those you missed.



Activate your daily emails

Sign up for “One Day at a Time,” 365 days of encouragement.



Discover bonus content

View bonus videos from your favorite experts and personal stories.



Access classic videos

See entire past editions of DivorceCare.



Get holiday help

Find tips to help you through the Thanksgiving and Christmas season.

Gain access today!

[DIVORCECARE.ORG/MY](https://divorcecare.org/my)

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HOW DIVORCECARE HELPS YOU

You're facing what is probably the most painful experience of your life. You need support, answers, and helpful direction. You need a safe place to ask questions, share experiences, and begin to heal.

You're in the right place. DivorceCare is designed with all of these needs in mind.



Video seminar – Each week you'll watch a 30-minute video with sound advice and helpful insights on managing emotions and divorce-related stresses.

Group discussion – After the video, you'll discuss with other group members what you learned from the video and how it applies to your circumstances.

Personal exercises – You'll receive a DivorceCare book filled with purposeful articles and exercises to help you move through the healing process.

At DivorceCare you'll meet other people who "get" what you're going through, because they've been there too. And you'll have a strategy for overcoming the emotional roller coaster of divorce. More specifically, you'll:

- Find healthy ways to deal with loneliness
- Gain control of your anger
- Learn to communicate more effectively with your ex and others
- Grow in confidence and peace
- Get a better handle on your emotions

And like the thousands of others who have turned to DivorceCare for support, you'll find hope for the future.

"DivorceCare was a powerful tool in my healing process." – Jennifer

GROUP GUIDELINES

It's important for a DivorceCare group to be a place where people feel safe, welcomed, and accepted. The most beneficial groups establish guidelines that members are committed to following and that are in the best interests of the members. Your group will develop its own guidelines, but here are some suggestions:

Share

There is no requirement to talk or share in the group, but you're encouraged to do so! There is great healing in being able to share your journey with others who really understand and care. But remember, if you tend to be a "talker," there are other people in the group who need to share too, so don't dominate the discussion time.

Listen

Be willing to listen. When someone else is speaking, focus on what that person is saying in order to learn, comfort, and help. Good listening builds relationships. Remember to refrain from cross talk (talking while someone else is talking).

Give and receive advice cautiously

As a general rule during the group, the best time to give advice is when someone asks for it. If someone requests your input, don't insist that person takes your suggestion or responds to issues in the same way you have. Also remember, the advice you receive from fellow group members may not be appropriate in your circumstances. Carefully evaluate the suggestions you receive.

Complete your participant guide exercises

Doing the weekly exercises in this book benefits both you and the group. By completing them, as well as attending the meetings, you'll be able to get the most that you can out of DivorceCare. It also prepares you for the discussion time. Group discussions reach their full potential when everyone does the exercises.

Don't date within the group

We do not allow dating among group members (or group leaders and group members) and strongly urge you to consider not dating at all while attending DivorceCare. This is a time for healing and building emotional strength. A new dating relationship more often than not distracts a person from the inner healing that needs to take place first. As a healthy alternative to dating, we encourage you to make friends with those of the same sex and exchange contact information to support each other during this time.

Be respectful

Everyone in the group comes from different situations and backgrounds. Be respectful of the differences, knowing that group members are there to find hope, comfort, and healing. Also, make every effort to avoid speaking of others (including your former spouse) in disparaging or slanderous terms.

Maintain confidentiality

Don't talk about things you hear in the group to people outside the group. This will help develop an atmosphere of trust. (But also keep in mind, there is no way the group can guarantee confidentiality, so use discretion about what you share.) A simple rule to remember—never tell someone else's story!

THE FOUNDATION FOR Healing

A personal relationship with Jesus Christ

Throughout DivorceCare you will hear people talking about the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in healing from divorce. In fact, you will hear it said that you cannot fully heal from divorce without the power of Christ in your life.

Please read the information in this section carefully. It will show you how to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and how this relationship can make a real difference in your life.

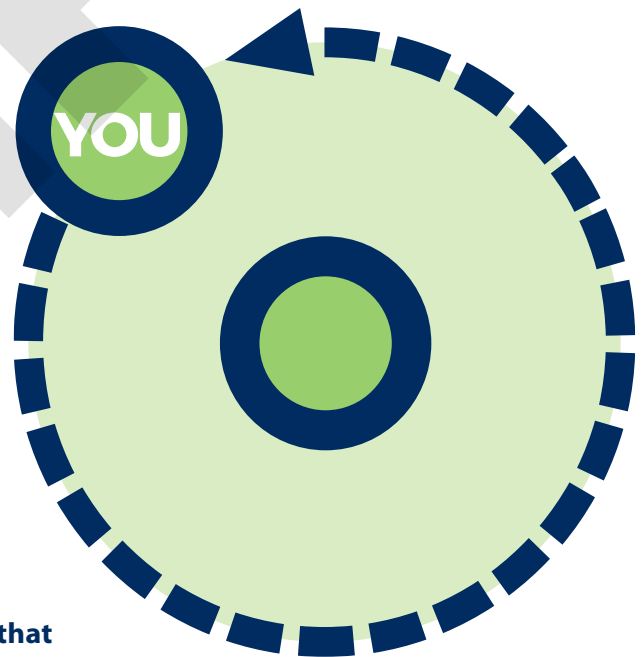
What is at the center of my life?

You tend to “orbit” around certain people, things, or events in your life. They are the relationships, possessions, and circumstances you value most. They give meaning to life and bring joy to you.

Here are some examples:

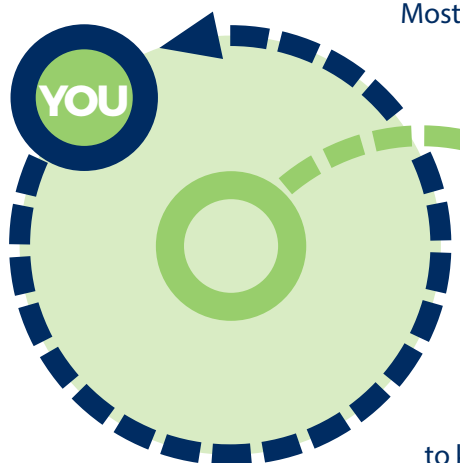
- Job
- Children
- Husband or wife
- Financial resources
- Favorite activities
- Friends
- Health
- Houses, cars, and possessions

Take a minute and list the people or things that your life revolves around. It may be one thing or a combination of items.



How solid is my center?

In our solar system, planets have a predictable orbit because the sun is a stable gravitational “center.” Imagine what would happen to those planets if the sun suddenly disappeared. **Now look at your list comprising the things at the center of your life. Which are permanent (cannot disappear or be lost)?**



Most things in your life can disappear. A husband or wife can leave the marriage or die. Your financial condition can suddenly change.

Possessions break, rust, and wear out. Your health can deteriorate. When these things happen, you lose what you had been relying on for your stability. As a result, your “orbit” will destabilize, sending your life into an emotional tumble.

In the end, only one thing is permanent—a relationship with God. If you have one, it cannot be taken away. Because this relationship with God is so critical to your stability, it’s important to know for sure that you have the kind of relationship with Him that will ensure He is permanently in the center of your life.

Achieving permanent stability

How can God become the center of your life? The first step is to remove a major barrier between yourself and Him.

The Bible says that our sins separate us from having a relationship with God. When we put anything other than God at the center of our lives, this is sin. Picture this: You invite a friend over to talk about your problems. Your friend arrives, turns on the TV, and barely nods at you. Your friend then surfs the net for a while and motions “not yet” when you ask for a minute of time. After that, your friend prepares one sandwich and munches on it while catching up on phone calls. While it’s certainly not wrong for your friend to watch TV, use the phone and internet, and eat, it’s hurtful that your friend centered on everything but you. How much more do you think God disapproves of us when we prioritize and value the things He’s created for us to enjoy more than we value Him?

In addition to possessions, time, and activities, we might put money, worries about the future, and even our family first in our lives before God. Other sins are more easily recognizable: bitterness, gossip, fits of rage, lies, judging others, not taking responsibility for our wrongs, desiring revenge, and sexual immorality.

Romans 3:23 says, **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** The book of Romans also says that the result of sin is death (separation from God). **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 6:23)



Your sin keeps you from God. Many people try to “earn” a relationship with Him by “being a good person” and “doing good things.” But notice in the previous verse (Romans 6:23) that eternal life is a gift. It cannot be earned. You must receive it from the Giver.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8–9)

Breaking through the barrier

If you can’t overcome your sin and earn a relationship with God, how can He become the center of your life? The Bible says that Jesus Christ removed the barrier between God and you by dying in your place. He paid the price for your disobedience. Romans 5:8 puts it this way: **“But**

God demonstrates his own love for us in

this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for

us.” It’s also important

to realize that Jesus

Christ is the only way

to a relationship with

God. John 14:6 reads,

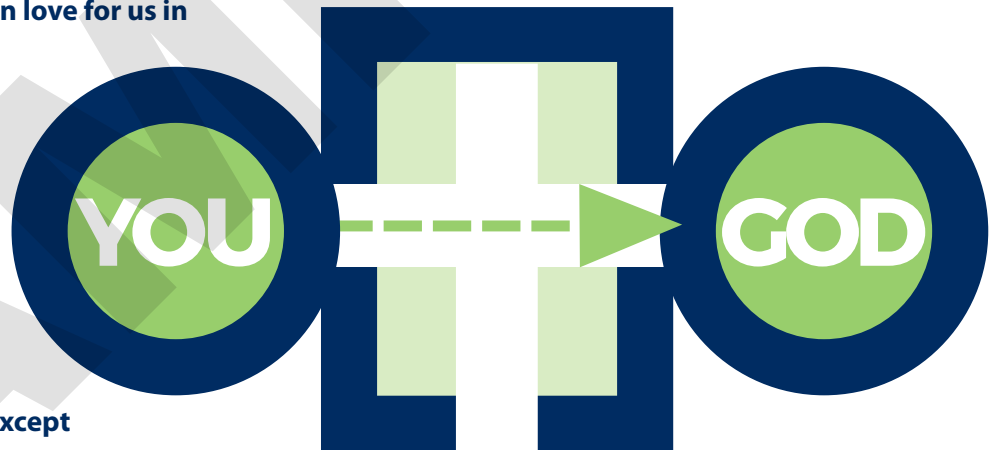
“Jesus answered, ‘I

am the way and the

truth and the life. No

one comes to the Father except

through me.”



Making it real in my life

Maybe right now you ache for the stability, security, and wholeness that come from having God at the center of your life. Once He’s there, you can access His power to help you heal from your separation or divorce. He can help stabilize your life’s orbit.

The first step is to believe that Jesus is God’s only Son and that He died to pay the price for your sins (the things you have done wrong). **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (2 Corinthians 5:21) After believing this, you need to turn control of your life over to Jesus. In effect, He becomes the center of your life.

How can God become the center of my life?

The Bible says that each person must surrender to Jesus as personal Lord and Savior through faith. To do this, you must first realize that you are a sinner and repent of (turn away from) your sin. The Bible says, **“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”** (Acts 3:19)

Receiving Jesus through faith means trusting Him alone as the payment for your sin and surrendering your life to Him. **“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”** (Romans 10:9–10)



Taking the step

If you would like to surrender your life to Jesus Christ, here is a prayer you can pray. Why not do it right now?

Dear God, I know I have done things that are wrong. Please forgive me for these sins. I turn control of my life over to Jesus, Your Son. I want Him to be my Savior and Lord. As my Savior, I rely on Him to save me from the effect of my sins through His death on the cross. As my Lord, I put Jesus at the center of my life and give Him control of it. Thank you for forgiving my sin and giving me the gift of eternal life with You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

If that prayer expresses the desire of your heart, your relationship with God through Jesus Christ can never be taken from you:

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.” (John 10:27–29)

8 things that are really different now

If you invited Christ into your life, many things have changed. Look at what has happened.

- 1. CHRIST IS IN YOUR LIFE:** *"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."* (1 John 5:11–13)
- 2. CHRIST'S POWER IS IN YOUR LIFE:** *"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."* (Philippians 4:13)
- 3. YOUR SINS WERE FORGIVEN:** *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."* (Ephesians 1:7)
- 4. YOU BECAME A PERMANENT PART OF GOD'S KINGDOM:** *"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe."* (Hebrews 12:28)
- 5. YOU RECEIVED THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE:** *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)
- 6. YOU CAN FIND ABUNDANT LIFE NOW:** *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* (John 10:10)
- 7. YOU CAN FIND GOD'S PEACE:** *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4:6–7)
- 8. GOD'S SPIRIT LIVES IN YOU:** *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."* (John 14:16–17)

What's next?

If you have surrendered your life to Jesus, let your DivorceCare leader know. He or she can connect you with a pastor, counselor, or a mature Christian friend to help you grow.

A good way to learn more about Jesus Christ is to read the book of John, found in the New Testament of the Bible. We suggest you commit to reading a chapter of this exciting book each day. As you read, pray that you will gain an even better understanding of how Jesus is changing your life.

It's also important for you to spend time with people who can help you know Jesus in an even deeper and more intimate way. The best way to do this is to become part of a church that will teach you and guide you in a growing relationship with Jesus.



Watch DivorceCare videos online—for free

CATCH UP, GET AHEAD, OR REVIEW

[DIVORCECARE.ORG/MY](https://divorcecare.org/my)

Access session videos online

You can watch the very same DivorceCare videos you see during DivorceCare meetings, in your home. It's a great way to:

- **Catch up if you miss a meeting**
- **Watch a video before your session begins**
- **Review a video you've already seen**

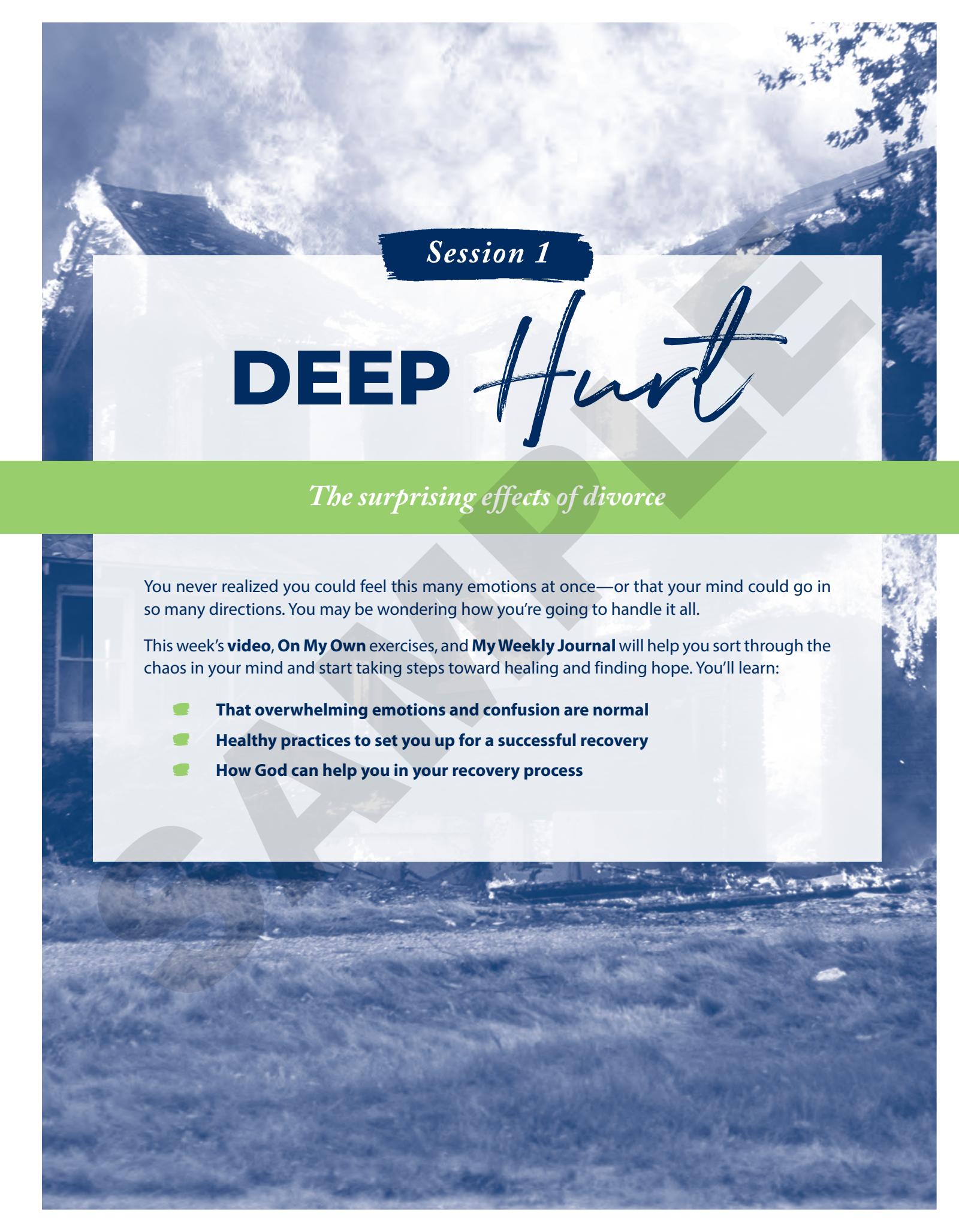
And much more ...

See additional bonus videos from the previous editions of DivorceCare for free.

How to watch?

[DIVORCECARE.ORG/MY](https://divorcecare.org/my)

Need help? Talk to your DivorceCare leader!



Session 1

DEEP *Hurt*

The surprising effects of divorce

You never realized you could feel this many emotions at once—or that your mind could go in so many directions. You may be wondering how you're going to handle it all.

This week's **video**, **On My Own** exercises, and **My Weekly Journal** will help you sort through the chaos in your mind and start taking steps toward healing and finding hope. You'll learn:

- **That overwhelming emotions and confusion are normal**
- **Healthy practices to set you up for a successful recovery**
- **How God can help you in your recovery process**



VIDEO OUTLINE

Use this outline to write down important concepts, encouraging words, or questions you may have while viewing the video.

THE DEVASTATION

REBUILDING TAKES TIME

Because divorce is

- Long, complicated, and invasive
- Disorienting and confusing
- Emotionally overwhelming

REBUILDING TAKES PLANNING

Monitor your eating habits

Ask wise, trustworthy friends to help you

"One or two close friends who are safe, who will speak the truth to you in love and tell you if you're starting to get off track—they will affect the decisions you make and who you become three to five years from now."

Georgia Shaffer

Turn to God in prayer

Consider other sources of support

HOW DIVORCECARE CAN HELP



Additional help

-  **How to stay on task** _____ p. 5
-  **Try changing your menu** _____ p. 5
-  **Where can I feel safe?** _____ p. 6

ON MY Own

Wisdom and encouragement for your new journey



THERESA'S STORY

"Once the divorce papers were filed, I thought, What's going to happen to me? What is going to happen to my children? It was as if somebody had come in and taken a hammer to my life. My life was in shards on the ground, and what do I pick up first? It's also like you're falling off this cliff and you don't know when you're going to land, how hard you're going to land, or if you're going to be okay when you land." You might feel a lot like Theresa, tumbling over that cliff. This week, you'll receive practical tools and insights to help you with the challenges you're facing.

1 HAS ANYONE ELSE EVER FELT LIKE THIS?

It might feel like your emotions are "off the scale," but what you're experiencing is actually pretty normal. It's also common to have trouble expressing what you're going through.

That's one reason God gave us the Psalms in the Bible. Thousands of years ago, many of the people who wrote these words were experiencing deep emotional pain. And you can use their words to pray and cry out to God today.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"1 Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. 2 I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. 3 I am worn out calling for help." (Psalm 69:1–3a)

"2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? ... 5 But I trust in your [God's] unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation." (Psalm 13:2, 5)

1. Circle the parts of today's verses you can most relate to.

2. Where do you usually turn when your emotions become overwhelming?

(Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Family or friends
- ☐ Television or web surfing
- ☐ Substances or food
- ☐ God/the Bible
- ☐ Other _____

3. **David (who wrote these psalms) says his difficulty is like drowning! Who is his “life-guard”? Why does David call out to Him?**

REMEMBER

- You aren’t the first (or last) to experience the emotions you’re feeling.
- God has provided the Psalms to help you express your sorrows, hopes, and regrets to Him.

“I felt embarrassed. And I was angry. Very angry.”

– Richard

2

SCATTERED BRAIN? HOW TO STAY ON TASK



When you’re in a marriage breakup, you’re trying to navigate unfamiliar terrain—and you may not even know which way is north! It might be hard to keep your tasks, activities, and responsibilities from swirling chaotically in your mind.

To organize your thoughts and stay on task, try these four tips:

1. **Write it down:** You can’t expect yourself to remember everything, so it helps just to get things out of your mind. Writing a to-do list relieves some of the stress because you no longer have to try to remember everything. Whew!

2. **Tackle tasks, not projects:** Sometimes you can get bogged down because you put projects on your to-do list instead of tasks. Projects are actually multiple tasks, which need to be broken down into smaller, more manageable tasks. For instance, instead of “Clean my closet,” break it down into “Sort my shoes,” “Pull out shirts I haven’t worn in six months,” etc.

3. **Prioritize by importance:** Sometimes things that are urgent keep us from doing the things that are important. Schedule time to do things that will benefit you long term, like exercising, preparing healthy meals, spending time with children, and praying.

4. **Chart your to-do list:** It can help to put all your to-dos in a chart based on when you need to do them—today, this month, etc. Also include the resources you’ll need to get them done (money, supplies, a babysitter). Download a free chart at divorcecare.org/my. Consider sharing your chart with friends who want to help, but don’t know how.

“Just to get out of bed was a feat in itself.” – Theresa

3

FEELING STRESSED? TRY CHANGING YOUR MENU



Separation and divorce take a toll on your mind and body. You probably feel run-down both mentally and physically. Unfortunately, when you’re stressed, it’s tempting to ignore what your body needs to stay strong. And when you do that, your body isn’t able to overcome the stress.

Throughout this book, you’ll find tips that will help you maintain your physical health while dealing with your separation or divorce.

The chart below shows the food your body—especially your brain!—needs to function well. And any diet that promotes good heart and digestive health is also associated with less anxiety and depression over time.

To keep both mind and body in good health, try making these adjustments:¹

Eat MORE of these	Eat LESS of these
Colorful fruits and vegetables (dark green, red, orange, yellow), 2–3 cups a day	Refined sugar (as in ice cream, baked goods, candy)
Whole grains (including brown rice), 3 or more ounces a day	Refined flour (as in baked goods, pastas), white rice
Lean sources of protein: fish, seafood, yogurt, skinless chicken, 5–6 ounces a day	Beef, pork, processed meats
Canola, safflower, sunflower, or olive oil, up to 2 tablespoons a day	Highly saturated fats (animal fats, butter, coconut oil, palm kernel oil)
Seeds and nuts, about an ounce a day	Potatoes
Skim or low-fat (1%) dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese), about 3 cups a day	Whole-dairy products

“It’s hard when you’re cooking for one.” – Carol

4

WHERE CAN I FEEL SAFE?

It’s even more painful when you’re hurt by someone you love—when a person who’s supposed to protect you is the one you need protection from. It’s in these heartbreaking moments that you need a perfect, loving Protector.

GOD’S MESSAGE TO YOU

“1 LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! 2 Many are saying of me, ‘God will not deliver him.’ 3 But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high.” (Psalm 3:1–3)

“Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you.” (Psalm 55:22a NLT)

1. According to these verses, what will God do for you when people who want to hurt you come against you?

2. What burdens are you currently carrying? What does Psalm 55:22 say to do with those burdens?

REMEMBER

- God hears you when you cry out to Him.
- When you need protection, God is the strongest shield you could ever hold on to.

“It’s like you’re walking through a war zone.”
– Theresa

5

I NEED BACKUP!

The road ahead looks hard. You see hazards, and you’re pretty sure more hurts are around the next bend. Maybe you wonder how you’re going to survive this journey.

David, who wrote many of the psalms, had some of the same thoughts. He was betrayed, was pursued by enemies, and fought many physical, emotional, and spiritual battles. How did he handle all of this? He had some help.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

6 Praise be to the LORD, for he has heard my cry for mercy. **7** The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him." (Psalm 28:6–7)

3 Since you [God] are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. **4** Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. **5** Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, LORD, my faithful God." (Psalm 31:3–5)

1. According to today's verses, where did David turn when he needed help?

2. What words are used to describe God in these verses? Based on these descriptions, how can God help you?

REMEMBER

- You're never alone in your struggles—you can always ask God for help.
- As your rock, fortress, shield, and strength, God can handle any problems you face.
- When you begin to trust God, you may not have the same emotional reaction that David did. But as your understanding of God deepens, you'll experience more peace and joy when you turn your problems over to Him.

BRIGHTER DAYS

THERESA'S STORY

"When I look back at what has happened in just a year and a half, I think, How in the world did I get through that? I still have days where that wave of sadness crashes over me. But I can tell you that I don't cry as often, and I find joy in doing things I used to enjoy.

"It's not the end. And if you take time to enjoy the small things, whether it's cooking, another hobby, talking with a friend, or going for a walk—something very minor can be major in your recovery. I still have a long way to go, but I don't feel hopeless, or helpless, or have that fear like it's never going to end."

NEXT SESSION

How to avoid the roadblocks to your recovery.

MY WEEKLY Journal

As you go through the trauma of separation or divorce, you'll experience a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions. Confusion is common—it can be hard to make sense of it all!

But there is something you can do to help calm the inner storm: journal. This practice can be extremely beneficial. First, it can slow ... down ... your ... racing ... mind. Second, writing about your experiences can help you think more clearly about them, which is critical for solving problems. Third, your journal also becomes a record of progress and growth as you move forward with recovery.

We recommend making a journal entry each day. Ultimately it's best to allow 15 minutes to do this. But as you're getting started, aim for 5 minutes and gradually spend more time journaling. You can use a spiral notebook or a digital recorder. Be sure to include the date of the entries. And remember, you don't need to share this with anyone, so be honest in your entries.

This week, start journaling by completing the following statements:

1. Today, I struggled with ... and I felt ...

2. Today, I felt a little better when ...

CHART YOUR PROGRESS

Place a check in the boxes to identify how you are feeling in each area this week: emotionally, physically, etc. Even better? Substitute a word or two to describe how you are doing.

	REALLY BAD	OKAY	PRETTY GOOD	GREAT
Emotionally				
Physically				
Spiritually (closeness to God)				
Relationally (closeness to others)				
How your life is in general				

FOR Parents

How to tell your kids about the divorce

When telling the children about an upcoming divorce, a lot depends upon your situation, the age of the children, and your family dynamics. You may be wondering where to start, what to include, how to explain things.

What to say

It is best if both parents come together to tell the children about the divorce. Find a place that is comfortable and with no distractions.

Start the conversation by telling your children how much you love them. Keep the conversation basic and reassuring. You might start by saying something like: “Mom [Dad] and I have been having some adult problems. We are going to be separating and getting a divorce. We both love you so very much. And none of this is your fault.”

Be up-front and honest when talking to the children. Speak slowly and distinctly so the children can grasp what is being said.

Sometimes the cause of a breakup is primarily due to the behavior of one spouse (e.g., an affair, abuse, addictions); it can be difficult to know what to tell the kids. Give children basic, age-appropriate information. Say something like: “When people do or say very harmful things, you may need to change the relationship. Your Mommy [Daddy] made some choices that were not very nice. So we needed to change the relationship. We can still pray for her, and you can still love her.”

How to say it

- **Young children**

Define it: Tell them what divorce means. (“This means I’m going to live here with you, and Mom [Dad] is going to live in another place. You’re going to spend time in both places.”)

Explain it: Be specific about how it affects their life. Tell them what will stay the same and what will be different. (“You’ll still go to the same school, but we won’t all live in the same house.”)

- **Elementary school children**

Explain at their level: At this age, kids need less information about what divorce is, but they still need to understand how divorce will affect them. And if they’ve heard rumors, they will need you to be truthful and answer each question as best you can without bashing their other parent.

- **Teenagers**

Tell, ask, listen: Teens bring their own ideas about divorce to the table. After telling them about the divorce, ask them what they think about it. Offer facts (calmly and without judgment) as best you can.

When to say it

After they hear this news, your kids will need the reassurance of your presence. Therefore, be wise about the timing of the conversation. For instance, don’t tell them you’re getting a divorce, and then go on a business trip the next day.

How to respond

- **Let them react:** Don’t try to squash their reactions. Offer empathy and support. You want your children to know they have the freedom to talk and ask questions. Help them feel safe when they talk with you.
- **Reassure them:** Tell the children again how much you love them and that it’s not their fault. Young kids in particular assume they did something that caused this. Tell them over and over that it’s not their fault and you love them.



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