

*Is Divorce Harmful to Children?*  
Rev. Edward D. Seely, Th.M., Ph.D.

I've had many people come to my office to seek help in various stages of problems in their marriage. As with most ministers, too many of these couples have come in after they've decided to end their marriage and only wanted our blessing on that decision.<sup>1</sup> Before they leave it is very important to ask them a two-fold question. It's one of last things they *want* to hear but one of the first things they *need* to hear.

After all the appropriate listening and empathizing with their painful experiences, at an opportune time in the discussion, it's essential to talk about God's will in their lives and in this matter, in particular as he says in Malachi 2:16, "I hate divorce...." Then ask the first part of the question, "Why do you want to do something God hates?" Allow some time for the person or couple to think before saying anything, then ask, "Have you considered how your decision is going to affect your children?"

"Oh, yeah," they typically say. "I've thought about it, and it won't be that big of a deal for them. They're resilient; they'll get over it fast."

Really? Says who? And with what solid evidence?

Many if not most people who have marriage problems talk with and seek the advice of others who have marriage problems themselves. They also talk with people who are already divorced and who are often trying to justify their decision, rather than seeking the wisdom, advice, and help of those who have a strong marriage and from whom they could learn how to overcome the challenges in married living, which all people have.<sup>2</sup>

As I've often mentioned in marriage and related classes, when you put two sinners under the same roof for 35 days let alone 35 years, you're going to have conflicts. Couples, especially young people who are idealistic and passionately in love (or at least in a strong "like"), typically have unrealistic expectations of married life. They usually also have an unrealistic worldview. When they run up against the problems that are part of real life in this world, they sometimes throw in the towel before learning how to work through the difficulties and come out with a stronger marriage and love for their spouse.

<sup>1</sup> When people have a problem in their marriage, they should make an appointment to talk with their pastor right away; don't wait. There is no shame in asking for help; far to the contrary, such a request is seen as a sign of strength and is highly respected as a desire to do God's will. Ask for help early, when it is easier to work through and resolve problems that can grow bigger, harden hearts, and dissolve the desire to resolve marital discord. Every marital problem can be overcome with God's succor, when both marriage partners are willing to accept him and his all-sufficient help. The sooner a couple, or even only one spouse if the other won't attend, meets with a pastor or other competent counselor, preferably a mature Christian, the higher the likelihood the problem(s) can be overcome, and the marriage can be strengthened in the process.

<sup>2</sup> They also read books by people who have been divorced. Be very careful with such literature. The authors write with varying motives and levels of maturity, and many are not Christians. Some write to justify their own decisions and actions. Always evaluate such and all other literature comparing and contrasting with the Bible, God's Word and our criterion and standard.

Christian married couples also need to keep in mind one more reality. They are models for others and influence them. People watch us; they learn from us. Are they seeing what God would have us do, and are they learning how to cope with and overcome the harsh realities in a sinful world?

When a couple decides to split and children are involved, more than two people in the family are deeply affected, and the other people, often being little, who have a vast number of questions and little information and less ability to understand, have a *huge hurt*. Moreover, their problems are just beginning. Research on children of divorce, and on adult children of divorce, reveals a very significant impact on the children that they carry with them throughout their lives. Overtime some develop better coping skills than others but all suffer significantly and in lasting ways.

This brief study<sup>3</sup> will only cite a limited number of the effects of divorce, and that number will be further limited to certain key effects on children. It is important that people understand what occurs in the lives of children of divorce, due to these presented and other reasons, not the least of which being political correctness in a symbiotic relationship with media bias, which usually obscures and distorts rather than reveals what takes place in the hearts and minds of children of all ages, including the littlest and most vulnerable people impacted by a divorce.

Careful scientific research indicates that unlike what the media and others would have you believe, children suffer deep and long-lasting negative effects from divorce. The effects of divorce on children include more than those here listed, and a multitude of careful research reveals these outcomes; only a sampling of documentation is supplied for reference if needed. See below the quote by renowned sociologist David Popenoe in Section #4.

One hopeful observation should be kept in mind for parents who are unmarried due to the death of their spouse. Careful science reveals that the following effects of losing a parent by divorce usually either do not occur at all or, if any do occur, are rare and not nearly as severe or as long lasting.<sup>4</sup> Moreover a strong connection with a true church, the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), is especially helpful.

Again, this list is not exhaustive but illustrative. Children from divorce situations in contrast to children from intact families exhibit differences in the following ways:

1. Significantly lower levels of
  - a. Health (NR5 10/88, p. 3)
  - b. Self-efficiency (NR 3/95, p. 3)
  - c. Social support (NR 3/95, p. 3)

<sup>3</sup> This paper, "Is Divorce Harmful to Children?" is available for free on the Marriage and Family pages of my WordPress Web site at [www.fromacorntoak12.com](http://www.fromacorntoak12.com) and on my academic Website at <https://seelyedward.academia.edu>.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Larry Bilotta, *18 Shocking Children and Divorce Statistics*, <http://www.marriage-success-secrets.com/statistics-about-children-and-divorce.html> (Accessed 5/13/15)

<sup>5</sup> *The Family in America: New Research*

- d. Effectual coping styles and fewer psychological resources for coping (NR 3/95, p. 3)
- e. Ability to adapt to daily challenges and disappointments (NR 3/95, p. 3)
- f. Self-perception of scholastic competence (NR 3/95, p. 3)
- g. Feeling accepted by peers (NR 3/95, p. 3)
- h. Friends, fewer friends and less of a support system<sup>6</sup>
- i. Achievement in school (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539), [including completing a college degree](#)<sup>7</sup>
- j. More “likely to experiment with or practice the spiritualities of religions other than their own.” (Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching*, p. 85)
- k. Church attendances
- l. Self-esteem (NR 3/95, p. 3; Franke<sup>9</sup>)  
 “Feminists have typically supported liberal divorce laws. Yet it is young women who often pay a high psychological price when their parents divorce. In a...study at Rhode Island College, researchers Terry Clifford and Roger Clark investigate the effects of parental divorce on young women by analyzing the psychological well-being of 198 female college students, 27% of whom had experienced parental divorce. Clifford and Clark’s statistical tests suggest that parental divorce does scar daughters: ‘adult female children of divorce have lower self-esteem than other adult female children.’

“Further parsing of the data establishes that the diminished self-esteem of adult daughters of divorce can ‘*not* be interpreted in terms of abusive environments in families of divorce,’ for the researchers see no evidence of such abusive environments in the young women’s responses. But this diminution of self-esteem ‘*can* be interpreted in terms of the loss of access to a parent that frequently...accompanies divorce.’ Indeed, regression analyses indicate that ‘virtually all’ of the association between parental divorce and diminished self-esteem among adult daughters of divorce ‘may be accounted for in terms of divorce’s impact upon parental access, on the one hand, and parental access’s impact upon self-esteem’ on the other. [*emphasis added*]”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Linda Bird Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 5, 1983, Section 15, p. 6. While this article contains significant research findings pertaining to the effects of divorce on boys, subsequent scientific investigation reveals that girls are hit equally as hard only the effects are delayed, seen later in what Judith Wallerstein calls “The Sleeper Effect.” As she discloses in her findings reported in this section, “We can no longer say—as most experts have held in recent years—that girls are generally less troubled by the divorce experience than boys. Our study strongly indicates, for the first time, that girls experience serious effects of divorce at the time they are entering young adulthood.” Judith S. Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” *The New York Times Magazine*, January 22, 1989, p. 21. Thus the title of Francke’s article should be altered.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin Benson, “Help Your Children Graduate? Stay Married,” on Website, *Return to Order*, by John Horvat at <https://www.returntoorder.org/2020/06/help-your-children-graduate-stay-married/?pkg=rtoe0992> (Accessed 6/12/20)

<sup>8</sup> Agnieszka Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” *Christianity Today*, March 2006, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Terry Clifford and Roger Clark, “Family Climate, Family Structure and Self-Esteem in College Females: The Physical- vs. Psychological-Wholeness Divorce Debate Revisited,” *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, Vol. 23, Nos. ¾, pp. 97-110 in NR, April 1996, pp. 1-2.

- m. In adulthood:
  - 1) Less religious<sup>11</sup>
  - 2) Fewer cultural opportunities (FA<sup>12</sup> 8/88)
  
- 2. Significantly higher rates of
  - a. Speech problems (NR 7/88, p. 3)
  - b. Emotional disturbances (NR 7/88, p. 4)
    - 1) “Children sense a deep loss and feel they are suddenly vulnerable to forces beyond their control.” (Psychologist Lee Salk, Quoted in “The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 58)
    - 2) “The trauma of divorce is second only to death.” (Lee Salk, *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 58)
    - 3) “An inordinately high proportion of children in mental-health treatment... Children of divorce make up an estimated 60 percent of child patients in clinical treatment and 80 percent—in some cases 100 percent—of adolescents in inpatient mental hospital settings.”<sup>13</sup>
    - 4) Feeling abandoned and again feeling so if a remarriage occurs (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, pp. 59, 66) As much as children of divorce struggle greatly, as the data herein indicate, evidence exists that children whose parents remarry and divorce again fare significantly worse than those whose parents only divorced once.<sup>14</sup>
    - 5) Depression.<sup>15</sup> One-third experience moderate to severe depression after five years.<sup>16</sup>
    - 6) Feeling overburdened. Many children feel responsibility to care for a divorced parent who is doing poorly, yet Wallerstein finds that “In truth, few children can rescue a troubled parent. Many become angry at being trapped by the parent’s demands, at being robbed of their separate identity *and denied their childhood*. And they are saddened, sometimes beyond repair, at seeing so few of their own needs gratified.”<sup>17</sup> (Emphasis mine)
    - 7) Stored up resentment (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59)
    - 8) An obsessive desire to reunite the parents (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 61)

<sup>11</sup> Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 41. “If Gen X is the generation of the spiritual but not religious, then children of divorce account a lot for that generation’s turn.” (p. 41)

<sup>12</sup> *The Family in America*

<sup>13</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Hughes, Jr., “The Effects of Divorce on Children,” <http://parenting247.org/article.cfm?contentid=646> (Accessed 5/13/15)

<sup>15</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Divorce and Kids: The Evidence is in,” *Reader’s Digest*, July 1993, p. 120.

<sup>17</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 41. See also Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” pp. 42-43.

- 9) Longing for their fathers. Wallerstein and her associates found that “In the decade after divorce, three in five children felt rejected by one of their parents, usually the father—whether or not it was true. The frequency and duration of visiting made no difference. Children longed for their fathers, and the need increased during adolescence.”<sup>18</sup>
- Referring to Wade, Horn and Busy, “Fathers, Marriage and Welfare Reform” a 1997 Hudson Institute Executive Briefing, Bilotta notes that 40% of children are being *raised without their father*.<sup>19</sup>
- 10) Suicide (NR 9/88, p. 2; Ronald Kotulak, *Chicago Tribune*;<sup>20</sup> Bilotta)  
 “Although society has a difficult time believing that adolescents commit suicide, it has an even harder time understanding that toddlers can take their own lives, said Dr. Perihan A. Rosenthal of the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, Worcester.
- “‘Intentional death-seeking behavior in children under five years of age remains an unappreciated phenomenon,’ said Rosenthal, who reported suicidal behavior in a 2 ½ year-old boy. The boy stopped eating for two weeks, threatened to throw himself in front of cars and bit himself to the point of bleeding after his parents’ divorce.”<sup>21</sup>
- 11) Trouble making friends<sup>22</sup>
- 12) Wallerstein reports children of divorce “Suffered a wide range of other behavior problems”<sup>23</sup> “Perhaps most important, overall, was our finding that divorce has a lasting psychological effect on many children, one that in fact, may turn out to be permanent. Children of divorce have vivid memories about their parents’ separation. The details are etched firmly in their minds, more so than those of any other experiences in their lives. They refer to themselves as children of divorce, as if they share an experience that sets them apart from all others.”<sup>24</sup>  
 These memories continue and they are painful.<sup>25</sup>
- c. Drug abuse (NR, 8/90, p. 4; NR 1/95)
- d. Alcohol use (NR, 1/95)
- e. Poverty (NR 1/90, p. 3; FA 8/88, p. 5; Wallerstein<sup>26</sup>)

<sup>18</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> Bilotta, *18 Shocking Children and Divorce Statistics*, <http://www.marriage-success-secrets.com/statistics-about-children-and-divorce.html> (Accessed 5/13/15)

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Kotulak, “Suicide called the No. 1 killer of adolescents,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 30, 1982, Section 1, p. 5. See also <http://www.children-and-divorce.com/children-divorce-statistics.html#long-term-effects>. (Accessed 5/19/15)

<sup>21</sup> Kotulak, “Suicide called the No. 1 killer of adolescents,” p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” pp. 41-42.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Hughes, Jr., “The Effects of Divorce on Children.”

<sup>26</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 42. “One in four [children of divorce] suffered a severe and enduring drop in the family’s standard of living and went on to observe a lasting discrepancy between their parents’ standards of living.” Wallerstein and Kelly found that “At the time of divorce, two-fifths of the families had been solidly upper class or upper middle class, whereas two-thirds of the women and their children were now [five years after the divorce] either solidly middle class or lower middle class.” Judith S. Wallerstein and

- “Nearly three-fourths of children in single-parent families will experience poverty by age 11, vs. about one-fifth of children in two-parent families.”<sup>27</sup>
- f. Premarital sex<sup>28</sup>  
 “Children from intact families are less likely to give birth out of wedlock or get in trouble with the law—both of which end up costing the government a bundle.”<sup>29</sup>
- g. School problems
- 1) Trouble concentrating<sup>30</sup>
  - 2) Excessive tardiness (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539)
  - 3) Excessive discipline problems (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539; Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120; Brown<sup>31</sup>)
  - 4) Twice as many suspensions (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539)
  - 5) More than half the truancy (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539; cf. Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
  - 6) Most of the expulsions (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539;<sup>32</sup> Brown, 6/28/80)
  - 7) More inclined to drop out (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539; Brown, 6/28/80; Bilotta)
  - 8) Account for the large number of Title I remedial programs (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539)
  - 9) Inordinately high proportion of children in special education classes.<sup>33</sup>
  - 10) Boys more inclined to aggressive behavior, including bullying and classroom disruption (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120; “The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59)
  - 11) Girls typically become withdrawn and silent (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59)
  - 12) Elevated sense of malaise. A team of distinguished British and American researchers studied 10,353 male and female children between ages seven and twenty-three. “They documented a highly significant ( $p < .0001$ ) link between parental divorce between ages 7 and 16 and elevated scores on the Malaise Inventory used to assess the mental health of adults at 23...the research team established that, after taking into account gender and economic status at age seven, parental divorce between the ages of 7 and 16 increased the odds of scoring above the clinical cutoff for psychopathology by 48 percent.”<sup>34</sup>
- h. Age group distinctions
- 1) Toddlers between the ages of 18 months to two and four years old
    - a) More irritable (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D.<sup>35</sup>)

Joan B. Kelly, “California’s Children of Divorce,” *Psychology Today*, January 1980, p. 68.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Cooper, “Going to Chapel,” *Time*, June 10, 2002, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Divorce and Kids: The Evidence is in,” p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> Cooper, “Going to Chapel,” p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> “1-parent children fare worse in school: study,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 28, 1980, p. 1. Report of a study by Frank Brown of 18,244 children, grades 1-12 from all economic and social levels.

<sup>32</sup> In the research on which this study was based children at the secondary level from one-parent families were the *only* ones expelled. *Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539.

<sup>33</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, Andrew J. Cherlin, and Kathleen E. Kiernan, “The Long-Term Effects of Parental Divorce on the Mental Health of Young Adults: A Developmental Perspective,” *Child Development* 66 (1995), pp. 1615-1634 in NR.

<sup>35</sup> G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., “Little ones big losers in divorce,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12/9/81, Section 6, p. 6.

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- b) Regression in development to a more dependent earlier level, e.g., demanding to be fed instead of feeding themselves; reverting to using diapers. (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59; G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81, et al.)
  - c) Frequent and particularly terrifying nightmares<sup>36</sup>
  - d) Children who are between birth and three to five when their parents divorce have a more difficult time establishing close and trusting relationships with their parents later in life than children whose parents divorced when they were older.<sup>37</sup>
- 2) Children between the ages of five and one-half/six and eight years old
- a) Assume responsibility for their parents’ divorce (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81)
  - b) Fears: abandonment and starvation (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59)
  - c) Pervasive sense of sadness (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 61); inconsolable sadness<sup>38</sup>
  - d) Children’s most vulnerable age when parents divorce, including for later suicide.<sup>39</sup>
- 3) Children between eight and twelve years old
- a) Anger directed at whichever parent is perceived to be the initiator of the divorce (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 61) or both parents (Maya Pines, *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1982, Section 1, p. 1)
  - b) Guilt (Maya Pines, *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1982, Section 1, p. 1)
  - c) Concern about being unloved and maybe unlovable (Maya Pines, *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1982, Section 1, p. 1)
  - d) Formation of a very close relationship with one friend or with a teacher or another adult, transferring emotions from the noncustodial parent (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 61)
  - e) Loneliness (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81)
  - f) Isolation (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81)
  - g) Helplessness (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81; Hughes)
- 4) In teen-age years
- a) Precocious sexuality (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120; Dobson<sup>40</sup>) related to identity confusion<sup>41</sup> “Just as girls without fathers have never really learned

<sup>36</sup> Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> “Children of Divorce: Study Finds Younger Children Feel Lasting Effects of Divorce,” [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/01/children-of-divorce\\_n\\_3529920.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/01/children-of-divorce_n_3529920.html) (Accessed 5/13/15). The study was published in the September 2013 issue of the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

<sup>38</sup> Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> From a report by two Ohio social scientists, Carl Tishler and Patrick McKenry, of a study of 46 teen-agers who had attempted suicide. *Sources & Resources*, 4/15/81, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> James Dobson, “Breakdown of family alters kids’ moral code,” *The Grand Rapids Press*, September 7, 2003, p. J6. “A team of researchers from the Oregon Social Learning Center...found that parental divorce plays a direct role in fostering sexual experimentation among adolescents.” Dobson adds “two-parent families are the healthiest and contribute directly to a stable society.”

<sup>41</sup> Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 6.

how to relate to a man, boys have not learned how to be one.”<sup>42</sup>

- b) Teen-age marriage (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
- c) Pregnancy (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
- d) Nonmarital birth (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
- e) Divorce (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
- f) Incarceration<sup>43</sup>

“Children from intact families are less likely to...get in trouble with the law...which end[s] up costing the government a bundle.”<sup>44</sup>
- g) Advancement of the time at which adolescents must develop independence and form their own adult identity (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81)
- h) Wallerstein’s study shows that “adolescence is a period of particularly grave risk for children in divorced families. Through rigorous analysis, statistical and otherwise, we were able to see clearly that we weren’t dealing simply with the routine angst of young people going through transition but rather that, for most of them, divorce was the single most important cause of enduring pain and anomie in their lives. *The young people told us time and again how much they needed a family structure, how much they wanted to be protected, and how much they yearned for clear guidelines for moral behavior. An alarming number of teen-agers felt abandoned, physically and emotionally.*”<sup>45</sup> [Emphasis mine]
- i) Suicide (Ronald Kotulak, *Chicago Tribune*<sup>46</sup>)

“Suicide is the No. 1 cause of death among adolescents, according to mental health experts who are attempting to deal with the growing problem of troubled youngsters. Fueled by a skyrocketing divorce rate....”
- i. Children worry even if they THINK their parents might be heading for a divorce. “Young adolescents view the possibility of parental divorce with deep concern, fearing it more than serious injury, the death of a friend, peer rejection, and even physical abuse.” (NR 3/89, p. 2; 9/95, p. 1)
- j. In adulthood
  - 1) Long-term effects, including “sleeper effects” that don’t emerge until many years later<sup>47</sup> Wallerstein and her associates found that children were worse off five years after the divorce: “these children were not recovering, as everyone thought they would. Indeed most of them were on a downward course. This is a powerful statistic, considering that these were children who were functioning well five

<sup>42</sup> Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 6. As a pastor it has grieved me to talk with many single mothers, mostly all divorced, who pleaded with me to connect them with male role models in the church. One program I began in response to this request was a well-received one called “Anglers for Christ” in which men in the church took children of single mothers fishing. Sadly, the board established to run the program had to close it due to legal advice concerning fear of litigation.

<sup>43</sup> Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120. “Nationally, over 70 percent of juveniles in state reform institutions come from homes without both parents present. Family breakup is thought to be an important source of high crime rates in the nation’s cities.”

<sup>44</sup> Cooper, “Going to Chapel,” p. 31.

<sup>45</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> Kotulak, “Suicide called the No. 1 killer of adolescents,” p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 22.



years before...[yet who] suffered such a rate of sudden serious psychological problems.”<sup>48</sup>

- 2) Fear of betrayal<sup>49</sup>
- 3) Anxiety and other worries.<sup>50</sup> In her 10-year follow-up study Wallerstein found 41% of now adult children of divorce “were doing poorly; they were entering adulthood as worried, underachieving, self-deprecating and sometimes angry young men and women.”<sup>51</sup> After her study, and after her and her colleagues’ experience in counseling more than 2,000 families in the Center for the Family in Transition that she founded, Wallerstein observes that it is necessary “to see divorce not as a single circumscribed event but as a continuum of changing family relationships—as a process that begins during the failing marriage and extends over many years. Things are not getting better, and divorce is not getting easier.”<sup>52</sup>
- 4) Delinquency in adulthood (NR 8/90, p. 4)
- 5) Adultery (NR 8/90, p. 2)
- 6) Divorce (NR 10/88, p. 3; NR 2/97; Tennant<sup>53</sup>)
- 7) Violent behavior (*The Washington Post*, 1/29/91, A6)
- 8) Cohabitation (NR 1/95; cf. Edward W. Beal, M.D. and Gloria Hochman, *Adult Children of Divorce: Breaking the Cycle and Finding Fulfillment in Love, Marriage, and Family* [Delcorte Press, 1991])
- 9) Premarital sex (NR 1/95)
- 10) Anti-social behavior, including failure to pay debts, drug dealing, handling stolen goods, and using a weapon (NR 7/97)
- 11) Child abuse and neglect (NR 2/97)
- 12) Insecurity (FA 8/88, p. 5; See also Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989.)
- 13) Instability (Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989.)
- 14) Underachieving (Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989.)
- 15) Self-deprecating (Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989.)
- 16) Harder time achieving intimacy in relationships<sup>54</sup> (See also Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120.)
- 17) Harder time forming a stable marriage (Zuckerman, 4/12/93, p. 72)
- 18) Harder time holding a steady job (Zuckerman, 4/12/93, p. 72)
- 19) Large percentage (45%) of males (age 19-23) 10 years after the divorce “still had no set goals, a limited education and a sense of having little control over their lives”
- 20) Less successful as adults, particularly in two essential domains of life, love, and work (Zuckerman, 4/12/93, p. 72)

<sup>48</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

<sup>49</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> Judith S. Wallerstein, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce*, quoted in Cal Thomas, “Divorce American Style, Is Ruining Our Children’s Lives.” *World*, April 2, 1989.

<sup>51</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 42.

<sup>54</sup> Mortimer B. Zuckerman, “The Crisis of the Kids,” *U.S. News & World Report*, April 12, 1993, p. 72.

- 21) Reduced desire to obey the commandment to honor both parents. “They weren’t there for me,” but a willingness to honor (including caring for in old age) one who is perceived as having cared for him or her. “I honor my mom. Given everything she did for me, how could I not?”<sup>55</sup>
  - 22) Distrust and even hatred of mothers (FA 8/88)
  - 23) Die sooner (NR 12/95)
  - 24) Children who are already adults whose parents recently divorced: “are very upset. They feel a lot of anger toward their parents.”<sup>56</sup>
3. Other problems
    - a. Shock (Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 1.)
    - b. Denial (Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 1.)
    - c. Anger (Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 1.)
    - d. Feelings of guilt (Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989.)
    - e. At 10 years after parents’ divorce, drifting (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
    - f. At 10 years after parents’ divorce, troubled (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
    - g. Loneliness (Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989 and Wallerstein and Kelly.<sup>57</sup>)
    - h. “[T]remendous fear they may end up with broken marriages of their own.”<sup>58</sup>
    - i. The divorce of parents when a girl or boy is still in childhood is also correlated with male and female homosexuality.<sup>59</sup>
  4. “...in three decades of work,’ writes sociologist David Popenoe, who has devoted much of his career to the study of families, ‘I know of few other bodies of data in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side of the issue: on the whole, for children, two-parent families are preferable to single-parent and stepfamilies.” (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
  5. Judith S. Wallerstein reports that “more often than not divorce is a wrenching, long-lasting experience for at least one of the former partners. Perhaps most important, we found that for virtually all the children, it exerts powerful and wholly unanticipated effects.”<sup>60</sup> “In many instances, conditions in the post-divorce family were more stressful and less supportive to the child than conditions in the failing marriage.”<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 43.

<sup>56</sup> June Louin Tapp, a University of Minnesota psychologist in a preliminary study of eight women aged 21 to 35 in “Divorce can shatter older children, too,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 2, 1984, Section 6, p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> Wallerstein and Kelly, “California’s Children of Divorce,” pp. 70-71.

<sup>58</sup> Maya Pines, “Divorce: Children follow in parents’ footsteps,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1982, Section 1, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Linda Ames Nicolosi, “New Evidence Found for Childhood Family Factors Influencing Sexual Orientation,” <http://www.narth.org/docs/influencing.html> (Accessed 4/12/15). For a more detailed explanation of the correlation between children of divorce and later homosexuality, see my book, *What Is God’s Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love*, pp. 76-77, available for free on the Current Issues page of my Web site at [www.fromacorntoak12.com](http://www.fromacorntoak12.com).

<sup>60</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 19.

<sup>61</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 42.

6. Wallerstein and her research team, unexpectedly to them, found “a diminished capacity to parent” and that “fully a quarter of the mothers and a fifth of the fathers had not gotten their lives back on track a decade after the divorce. The diminished parenting continued, permanently disrupting the child-rearing functions of the family.”<sup>62</sup>
7. Current research that is carefully done, following the scientific method and where the scientist has suspended his or her subjective biases and allowed the data to speak for themselves (exegesis) rather than reading into and manipulating the data to provide what he, she, or a study sponsor or grantor want to see (eisegesis), tends to show results consistent with the earlier studies.<sup>63</sup> Yet be careful of some newer “studies” that are tending to play down painful elements in previous studies.

Scientists are human also and therefore are sinful, like every other human being (Romans 3:23), and that sin issues forth in motivations that interfere with the finding, interpreting, and publishing of true, sound, and reliable research results. Such motivations include avoiding the pain of the typically harsh reactions social scientists have received when disclosing the truth about divorce and its effects. Others want to please their institutional sponsors who have paid them for their research and hoping for a certain result. With a mind toward future work some scientists want to reward their sponsor with the results he or she wants to see. The scientist also wants to play in accord with the politically correct orientation of those government and other organizations that provide grant money for research. The desires for fame and peer approval lie close to consciousness when shaping the research plan and interpreting the findings as well as applying its results.

8. In her four-year, nationally representative survey of 1,500 young adults between 18 and 35, Marquardt, herself a child of divorce, found that “most marriages that are ending in divorce are low-conflict and look a lot like the ones that are staying together. Research shows that married couples generally fight about the same five things: money, sex, in-laws, religion, and time. Some choose to get divorced over it; some don’t. If, after divorce, you could find new strength within yourself to get past your issues and cooperate with your ex, then you could do it before he or she is your ex.”<sup>64</sup>

Another reason to reconsider working out marital problems and deciding to not divorce wherever *truly* possible, is the negative effect on the adults throughout the rest of their lives, which also affects their adult children negatively. For example, The Pension Rights Center, “a national consumer organization working to protect and promote the retirement rights of workers, retirees and their families...[reports that] Divorced women over 65 are three times more likely to live in poverty than their married counterparts. And often women who were awarded a portion of their ex-spouse’s pensions find it difficult to obtain the pensions they rightfully deserve.”<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 21.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Hughes, Jr., “The Effects of Divorce on Children”

<sup>64</sup> Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> Karen Friedman, Pension Rights Center ([pensionrightgts.org](http://pensionrightgts.org)), Washington, D.C., in a letter to Amy Dickinson

9. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, research associate at the Institute for American Values, asserts that the societal trends since the 1970s, such as single-parent families, out-of-wedlock childbearing and no-fault divorce have been devastating to children. A *Chicago Tribune* editorial synthesizes Whitehead's findings.

Indeed, it was an unreasoned but emotionally appealing shift in attitude, Whitehead says, that allowed Americans in the 1970s to begin viewing spiraling rates of divorce, out-of-wedlock childbearing and other "family disruptions" as nothing to be particularly worried about and even, on the whole positive for society because they seemed to serve the happiness of individuals.

That "shift in the social metric," Whitehead says, replaced the well-being of children with adult happiness as the yardstick for measuring social behavior. "Once the social metric shifts from child well-being to adult well-being," she writes, "it is hard to see divorce and nonmarital birth in anything but a positive light."

It also is hard to avoid contriving the sorts of lies with which adult Americans begin to rationalize their moral neglect of their children...

Increasingly, Whitehead's article makes clear, both social science and common sense make such nonsense untenable. The rationalizations that adults used to comfort themselves have discomfited our children terribly, and we are all paying a heavy price for it.<sup>66</sup>

10. While all things are possible with God (e.g., Matthew 19:26), not all things are beneficial, even though he helps his people deal with their pain and suffering. (1 Corinthians 6:12) Even though some people consciously or unconsciously avail themselves of God's grace that gives them the ability to survive the divorce of their parents and function reasonably well as adults, they all suffer greatly, carrying the effects of the divorce to varying degrees throughout their whole lives.

Parents thinking about divorce must consider the above information and choose an alternative to overcome their problems, especially parents who claim to be Christians. Remember that God says, "I hate divorce" (Malachi 2:16). We've seen above some of the reasons why.

God provides ways to overcome problems in marriage. The first way he provides is preventative, even before marriage, i.e., taking the steps he has declared in his Word, which I've included in the document/program entitled, *Guidelines for Selecting a Marriage Partner* (Unabridged Version), including God's vitally important command to

published in the *Loveland Reporter-Herald*, January 29, 2019, p. 5B.

<sup>66</sup> "Was Dan Quayle right?" *Chicago Tribune*, March 21, 1993, Section 4, p. 2.

only marry a fellow believer in Christ—one who demonstrates over time (before marriage, even before engagement) that he or she is growing and maturing in his or her love for and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the sake of the children, who are first and foremost his children, to overcome and not add more problems, and to honor him, choose one of these other ways God provides. These ways can be found in God’s Word (e.g., John 3:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 1 Corinthians 13; Ephesians 5:18-33) and by consulting with a church pastor who holds to and faithfully proclaims the Bible to be the true, trustworthy, infallible, and inerrant Word of God and his highest authority.

Marquardt found that “The way that evangelical theology emphasizes the central saving role of the personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God as your Father resonates with some children of divorce. They say, *“My earthly parents were not there for me—or, My earthly father failed me, but in God I found that loving father figure I never had.”*<sup>67</sup> [Emphasis Tennant’s] Churches also provide opportunities for Godly men to interact with children who lack a significant male figure in their lives.

Marquardt observes that “evangelical churches do a somewhat better job of acknowledging divorce as a problem. Our mainline Protestant churches don’t want to offend divorced and single parents in their congregations, so they don’t reach out to the children as a consequence.”<sup>68</sup> What the above means is that we, who have the help God provides his people, must proactively reach out to them to offer it and not just wait until they come to us.

There is much truth to the old adage, “Stay together for the sake of the children.” Even more so, do it to glorify God, who can help you save your marriage. Your marriage can be saved if both of you are willing to follow God’s will. I’ve seen the toughest marital situations resolved and those marriages restored in and through Jesus Christ. Remember what Jesus said, “with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26; cf., Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17; Luke 1:17; 18:27; Romans 4:20-25)

If you can’t stop your spouse from divorcing you, seek pastoral counsel and legal advice from an attorney who is a mature Christian. If you don’t know one, your pastor can help you find one. Just don’t be the one to put yourself and your children through the trauma of divorce with the seriously mistaken view that “they’re resilient; they’ll be OK in little while and be just fine.” Seek God’s help directly and through the body of Christ, the church. Don’t despair. If you’ve done all you can to save your marriage and you can’t, trust God. He’ll help you and your children to come through this very difficult situation; it won’t be easy, but he’ll get you through it.

<sup>67</sup> Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 42.

<sup>68</sup> Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 42.

*In Christ we have huge hope, a realistic and realized expectation.*

Since God is sovereign, loves us, and keeps his promises, we have a realistic reason for hope. (Cf., e.g., Romans 4:16-25; 5:1-11; 8:22-27; 15:13; Ephesians 1:15-23; Hebrews 6:9-12, 19-20; 11:1; 1 Peter 1:3-9) Our hope is firmly grounded on God's fulfillment of his promise of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose first coming has already occurred, laying the basis for the completion of God's plan of redemption and all the joy coming with it, much of which is already present, even though it is not yet here in its fullest.

This firm hope is based on the Bible, God's Word, which reveals that Jesus Christ has accomplished victory over sin, evil, Satan and his demonic forces, and all that would eternally separate us from God and his all-sufficient help. In Christ we have salvation now, but it is not yet in its fullest and most complete manifestation; that will come when Christ returns in his glorious Second Coming and restores God's original plan of perfection for his creation.

Yes, God will bring us through the deep waters and the great valleys of life. (Isaiah 43:1-5) As in the theme of the Book of Revelation, Christ has overcome the forces of evil, and those of us who are his called, chosen, and faithful followers to serve him will be victorious as well. (Revelation 17:14) Some divorced and now single parents who are maturing in Christ have raised their children in Christ and have overcome many if not most of the harms inflicted on them due to their parents' divorce. They have overcome to the extent that they are able to live responsible and fruitful lives in the Lord, but most of all because of their relationship to and maturing in the Lord (the theological terms for which being regeneration and sanctification respectively).

Children of divorce who do believe in, mature in, and follow Christ will overcome, but this maturity in Christ is not a given as seen above; the tendency with families of divorce is less not more involvement in church and spiritual maturity. Neither is it in any way to be considered encouragement and/or a reason for going ahead with a divorce. Further, why give your, and even more importantly God's, precious children added wounds and scars they'll carry for life? Inform your spouse of this information. Give him or her a copy of this paper.

If you have a friend with children who is thinking about divorcing his or her spouse, gently raise the question I did in the second paragraph of this paper. Remember your calling from God to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), and give your friend a copy of this study or the link to it on the Marriage page of my Web site at [www.fromacorntoak12.com](http://www.fromacorntoak12.com).

Seek the triune God's help directly and through the body of Christ, the church. Don't despair. If you've done all you can to save your marriage and you can't, trust God. Ask God for forgiveness for anything you've done that has led to the divorce. He'll help you and your children to come through this very difficult situation; it won't be easy, but he'll get you through it.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will

not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.... (Psalm 46:1-2)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you...I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:6-7, 9, 11-13)