

Is Divorce Harmful to Children?
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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.¹ 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? The true answer: None.

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.²

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

¹ 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.

² 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.

stronger marriage and love for their spouse.

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.

Glenn T. Stanton, author and director of global family formation studies at Focus on the Family, reports on the research of one of the leaders in the study of the effects of divorce on children, Judith Wallerstein. He writes,

Her research showed the negative impact on children was what she called “cumulative.” Problems compounded as these children entered their adult years. They certainly did not “adjust” to the end of their parent’s marriage and the resulting death of the family they knew and depended on.”

She observed in 2004,

The central finding of this study is that parental divorce impacts detrimentally the capacity to love and be loved within a lasting, committed relationship. At young adulthood, when love, sexual intimacy, commitment, and marriage take center stage, children of divorce are haunted by the ghosts of their parents’ divorce and are frightened that the same fate awaits them. These fears, which reach a crescendo at young adulthood, impede their developmental progress into full adulthood.

Wallerstein found that a third of her 131 study subjects “were openly pessimistic about marriage and divorce and sought to avoid both.” She adds, “Divorce begets fewer marriages, poorer marriages, and more divorces.”

We should all agree this is a horrible curse for one generation to cast upon another. She concluded that her 25-year study “points to divorce not as an acute stress from which the child recovers but as a *life-transforming experience* for the child” (emphasis in original).³

³ Glenn T. Stanton, “A deep and lasting wound: New advanced research shows divorce brings long-term harm for adult children,” [WORLD, May 27, 2025](#).

This brief study⁴ 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.⁵ 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 (NR⁶ 10/88, p. 3)
 - b. Self-efficiency (NR 3/95, p. 3)
 - c. Social support (NR 3/95, p. 3)
 - 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 system⁷

⁴ This paper, "Is Divorce Harmful to Children?" is available for free on the Marriage and Family pages of my general website at <https://fromacorntoak12.com/> (also edwardseely.com, a shorter URL that goes directly to the general website) and on my academic website at <https://seelyedward.academia.edu>.

⁵ 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)

⁶ *The Family in America: New Research*

⁷ 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.

- i. Achievement in school (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539), [including completing a college degree](#)⁸
- 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 attendance⁹
- l. Self-esteem (NR 3/95, p. 3; Franke¹⁰)

“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*]”¹¹

- m. In adulthood:
 - 1) Less religious¹²
 - 2) Fewer cultural opportunities (FA¹³ 8/88)

⁸ 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)

⁹ Agnieszka Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” *Christianity Today*, March 2006, p. 43.

¹⁰ Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 1.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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)

¹³ *The Family in America*

2. Significantly higher rates of what are called Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
 - a. ACEs such as domestic violence and living with a substance abuser

A sound study including the contrasting effects of strong vs. broken family relationships among Arizona children ages six to seventeen by the National Survey of Children's Health 2022-2024, reported by The Institute for Family Studies and Center for Arizona Policy, discovered

a profound difference. Indeed, with controls for age, sex, race, income, and parental education and immigration status, children from non-intact families are about 91% more likely to be earning poor grades than children from intact families.

Intact, married families are a clear and substantial protection against children experiencing one or more ACEs...The protective effect of intact, married families is demonstrable. Net of controls, school-aged children in non-intact families are remarkably 274% more likely to experience at least one or more...several...ACEs, including domestic violence or living with a substance abuser, and are more likely to suffer from depression, compared to kids raised by married parents... [i.e.] compared to their peers growing up in an intact family in Arizona.¹⁴

- b. Speech problems (NR 7/88, p. 3)
- c. Emotional disturbances (NR 7/88, p. 4)
 - 1) Psychologist and highly-regarded author, Dr. James Dobson, has written,

...the emotional development in children is directly related to the presence of warm, nurturing, sustained and continuous interaction with both parents. Anything that interferes with that vital relationship with either mother or father can have lasting consequence for the child.¹⁵
 - 2) "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)
 - 3) "The trauma of divorce is second only to death." (Lee Salk, *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 58) And for a considerable number of people, divorce is worse than

¹⁴ Brad Wilcox, Grant Bailey, Sophie Anderson, Peter Gentala and Bob Trent, "[Renewing Arizona Families: Why Strong Families Are Central To Arizona's Future](#)." May 2026. The Institute for Family Studies and Center for Arizona Policy.

¹⁵ James Dobson, quoted by Timothy S. Goeglein, "[Divorce is not good for children](#)," *The Washington Times*, June 23, 2025. (Accessed 07/10/2025)

death—much worse—since they perceive and feel that the one voluntarily leaving is choosing to reject them. By very important contrast, the parent who died is not perceived as rejecting the family, with the possible exception of some suicides.

- 4) Feeling abandoned, and again feeling so if a remarriage occurs. Remarriage adds to the intensity of the feeling, as second and third marriages result in higher percentages of divorce (70% for second marriages and 90% for third marriages).¹⁶

Furthermore, remarriage is frequent. In their powerful study of more than five million minors, Johnston, Jones, and Pope (*op cit.* below) observed the following.

Half of parents remarry within five years, introducing stepparents to children’s lives. Parents also add more dependents after divorce, indicating that divorce and remarriage create new family responsibilities that may diffuse parental attention and resources. These changes in family life reveal that, rather than an isolated legal shock, divorce represents a bundle of treatments—including income loss, neighborhood changes, and family restructuring—each of which might affect children’s outcomes.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

- 5) “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.”¹⁹ Moreover, mental health crises are widespread and rising.²⁰
- 6) Depression.²¹ One-third experience moderate to severe depression after five years.²²
- 7) 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

¹⁶ “The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, pp. 59, 66 and “[Guidelines for Selecting a Marriage Partner \(Unabridged Version\)](#).”

¹⁷ Andrew C. Johnston, Maggie R. Jones, Nolan G. Pope, “Divorce, Family Arrangements, and Children’s Adult Outcomes,” May 2025, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w33776/w33776.pdf (Accessed 07/09/2025)

¹⁸ Robert Hughes, Jr., “The Effects of Divorce on Children,” <http://parenting247.org/article.cfm?contentid=646> (Accessed 5/13/15)

¹⁹ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 43.

²⁰ Countless reports document this phenomenon; see, e.g., Sarah Holliday, “[8.3 Million Minors Received Mental Health Care in 2023, Highlighting a ‘Decaying Culture.’](#)” *The Washington Stand*, August 12, 2024.

²¹ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

²² Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Divorce and Kids: The Evidence is in,” *Reader’s Digest*, July 1993, p. 120.

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.”²³ (Emphasis mine)

- 8) Stored up resentment (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59)
- 9) An obsessive desire to reunite the parents (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 61)
- 10) 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.”²⁴

- 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*.²⁵

- 11) Suicide (NR 9/88, p. 2; Ronald Kotulak, *Chicago Tribune*;²⁶ 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.”²⁷

- 12) Trouble making friends²⁸
- 13) Wallerstein reports children of divorce “Suffered a wide range of other behavior problems”²⁹

“Perhaps most important, overall, was our finding that divorce has a lasting

²³ 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.

²⁴ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 42.

²⁵ Bilotta, *18 Shocking Children and Divorce Statistics*, <http://www.marriage-success-secrets.com/statistics-about-children-and-divorce.html> (Accessed 5/13/15)

²⁶ 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)

²⁷ Kotulak, “Suicide called the No. 1 killer of adolescents,” p. 5.

²⁸ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

²⁹ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

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."³⁰ These memories continue and they are painful.³¹

- d. Drug abuse (NR, 8/90, p. 4; NR 1/95)
- e. Alcohol use (NR, 1/95)
- f. Poverty (NR 1/90, p. 3; FA 8/88, p. 5; Wallerstein³²)

"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."³³

Reporting on another major and very large study, Andrew C. Johnston (University of Texas at Austin Department of Economics and the National Bureau of Economic Research [NBER]), Nolan G. Pope (University of Maryland, College Park and NBER), and Maggie R. Jones (U. S. Census Bureau) in consultation with numerous additional scholars from many other U. S. universities, published "Divorce, Family Arrangements, and Children's Adult Outcomes," a working paper published by the NBER in May 2025. They include the following statement in a summary of their findings.

Nearly a third of American children experience parental divorce before adulthood. To understand its consequences, we use linked tax and Census records for over 5 million children to examine how divorce affects family arrangements and children's long-term outcomes. Following divorce, parents move apart [meaning, as the report adds, farther away from the children's father (which has significant and lasting negative impact for both girls as well as boys), since 95% of children of divorce usually live with their mother], household income falls, parents work longer hours, families move more frequently, and households relocate to poorer neighborhoods with less economic opportunity.... In the years following divorce, we observe sharp increases in teen births and child mortality.... We find that

³⁰ Wallerstein, "Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don't Heal," pp. 41-42.

³¹ Robert Hughes, Jr., "The Effects of Divorce on Children."

³² 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 Joan B. Kelly, "California's Children of Divorce," *Psychology Today*, January 1980, p. 68.

³³ Matthew Cooper, "Going to Chapel," *Time*, June 10, 2002, p. 31.

parental divorce reduces children's adult earnings and college residence while increasing incarceration, mortality, and teen births. Changes in household income, neighborhood quality, and parent proximity account for 25 to 60 percent of these divorce effects.³⁴

The Arizona study (*op cit.*) concluded that “it is no surprise that in Arizona, children in married, intact homes are much less likely to be living in poverty. In fact, less than 1 in 10 children in intact, married families live in poverty in Arizona, compared to over 1 in 5 children with cohabiting parents, and 1 in 4 children in single-mother families.” The study found that “After controls for district level income and share of family households headed by married adults [and race]...again, family structure is more predictive of reading proficiency than race and ethnicity.”³⁵

g. Premarital sex³⁶

On the contrary, “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 [which means all taxpayers] a bundle.”³⁷

h. School problems

- 1) Trouble concentrating³⁸
- 2) Excessive tardiness (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539)
- 3) Excessive discipline problems (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539; Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120; Brown³⁹)
- 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;⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹
- 10) Boys more inclined to aggressive behavior, including bullying and classroom

³⁴ Andrew C. Johnston, Maggie R. Jones, Nolan G. Pope, “Divorce, Family Arrangements, and Children’s Adult Outcomes,” May 2025, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w33776/w33776.pdf (Accessed 07/09/2025)

³⁵ Brad Wilcox, et al., “Renewing Arizona Families: Why Strong Families Are Central To Arizona’s Future.”

³⁶ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Divorce and Kids: The Evidence is in,” p. 120.

³⁷ Cooper, “Going to Chapel,” p. 31.

³⁸ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

³⁹ “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.

⁴⁰ 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.

⁴¹ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 43.

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.”⁴²

i. 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.⁴³)
 - 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 nightmares⁴⁴
 - 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.⁴⁵
- 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 by both parents continuing in adulthood and starvation (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59; Judith Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, quoted in “[The Effects and Impact of Divorce on Children](#),” Focus on the Family, June 25, 2025)
 - c) Pervasive sense of sadness (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 61); inconsolable sadness⁴⁶

⁴² 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.

⁴³ G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., “Little ones big losers in divorce,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12/9/81, Section 6, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 6.

⁴⁵ “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 (Accessed 5/13/15). The study was published in the September 2013 issue of the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

⁴⁶ Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 6.

- d) Children's most vulnerable age when parents divorce, including for later suicide.⁴⁷
- 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; Dobson⁴⁸) related to identity confusion⁴⁹ "Just as girls without fathers have never really learned how to relate to a man, boys have not learned how to be one."⁵⁰
 - 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) Incarceration⁵¹

"Children from intact families are less likely to...get in trouble with the law...which end[s] up costing the government a bundle."⁵²
 - 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) Vulnerability, need for foundational family structure

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ 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."

⁴⁹ Francke, "Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce," p. 6.

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ 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."

⁵² Cooper, "Going to Chapel," p. 31.

Wallerstein writes,

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.*⁵³ [Emphasis mine]

i) Suicide (Ronald Kotulak, *Chicago Tribune*⁵⁴)

“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....”

j. 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)

k. In adulthood

1) Long-term effects, including “sleeper effects” that don't emerge until many years later⁵⁵

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 years before...[yet who] suffered such a rate of sudden serious psychological problems.”⁵⁶

2) Fear of betrayal⁵⁷

3) Anxiety and other worries.⁵⁸

⁵³ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don't Heal,” p. 42.

⁵⁴ Kotulak, “Suicide called the No. 1 killer of adolescents,” p. 5.

⁵⁵ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don't Heal,” p. 22.

⁵⁶ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don't Heal,” p. 20.

⁵⁷ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don't Heal,” p. 21.

⁵⁸ Judith S. Wallerstein, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce*, quoted in Cal

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.”⁵⁹ 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.”⁶⁰

- 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; Tennant⁶¹)
- 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])

Children whose parents have divorced tend to want to cohabit before, or instead of, marrying. Judith Wallerstein explains why.

Out of their experience of the parental breakup, children of all ages reached a conclusion that terrified them: Personal relationships are unreliable, and even the closest family relationships cannot be expected to hold firm....this was an enduring theme that rose to new prominence as the youngsters reached adulthood.⁶²

- 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.)

Thomas, “Divorce American Style, Is Ruining Our Children’s Lives.” *World*, April 2, 1989.

⁵⁹ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

⁶⁰ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

⁶¹ Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 42.

⁶² Judith S. Wallerstein, “THE UNEXPECTED LEGACY OF DIVORCE: Report of a 25-Year Study,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 2004. Vol. 21. No. 3, p. 359. This study is especially significant, because, as Wallerstein writes, “This is the first and only such report that tells the story of growing up in the postdivorce family through the eyes of children.” (p. 354) It is a very gripping and sad report of what children of divorce experience and feel. Parents considering a divorce must be informed of the huge and life-long impact divorce will have on their children. It is unwise, ignorant of the facts, disobedient to God, and cruel to the children for parents to not seek pastoral counseling and marital counseling to save their marriage, most of which can be saved if both wife and husband want to save their marriage.

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- 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 relationships⁶³ (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)
- 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?”⁶⁴

- 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.”⁶⁵

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.⁶⁶)
- h. “[T]remendous fear they may end up with broken marriages of their own.”⁶⁷
- i. LGBTQ+ The divorce of parents when a girl or boy is still in childhood is correlated with male and female homosexuality.⁶⁸ The phenomenon, inaccurately referred to as

⁶³ Mortimer B. Zuckerman, “The Crisis of the Kids,” U.S. News & World Report, April 12, 1993, p. 72.

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

⁶⁵ 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.

⁶⁶ Wallerstein and Kelly, “California’s Children of Divorce,” pp. 70-71.

⁶⁷ Maya Pines, “Divorce: Children follow in parents’ footsteps,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1982, Section 1, p. 1.

⁶⁸ 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 website at <https://fromacorntooak12.com/>.

transgenderism, is also correlated with childhood trauma, including their parents' divorce.⁶⁹

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."⁷⁰ "In many instances, conditions in the post-divorce family were more stressful and less supportive to the child than conditions in the failing marriage."⁷¹
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."⁷²
7. Current research that is carefully done—following the scientific method, including the scientist acknowledging and suspending his or her subjective biases, and allowing the data to speak for themselves (exegesis) rather than reading into (eisegesis) and manipulating the data to provide what he, she, or a study sponsor, a grantor of funding, wants to see—tends to show results consistent with the earlier studies.⁷³ 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

⁶⁹ Angel L. Montejo, Elena Tomba, "Higher Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Transgender Than in Cisgender Individuals: Results from a Single-Center Observational Study," National Library of Medicine/National Center for Biotechnology Information. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10342728/> (Accessed 07/10/2025) See also Jennifer Bauwens, Ph.D. and Walt Heyer, *Embracing God's Design: Addressing the Spiritual and Psychological Crisis Behind Transgender Identity*, Fidelis Publishing, 2025. For an explanation of why the term, "transgenderism," is scientifically inaccurate, see *What Is God's Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love*.

⁷⁰ Wallerstein, "Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don't Heal," p. 19.

⁷¹ Wallerstein, "Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don't Heal," p. 42.

⁷² Wallerstein, "Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don't Heal," p. 21.

⁷³ Robert Hughes, Jr., "The Effects of Divorce on Children"

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.⁷⁴

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.”⁷⁵

The above-mentioned Arizona study observed many benefits to marriage and staying married. The research reported that “thousands of social science studies demonstrate that married men and women live longer, have healthier lives, earn and save more money, recover more quickly and successfully from illness, stay out of trouble with the law, are dramatically less likely to attempt and commit suicide, and are more likely to be emotionally healthy.”⁷⁶

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.”⁷⁷

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

⁷⁴ For further information on how science is corrupted and how to discern the difference between true and false science, see the essay by Edward D. Seely, “[Science: Distinguishing Between Sound and Flawed Science.](#)”

⁷⁵ Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 43.

⁷⁶ Brad Wilcox, et al., “Renewing Arizona Families: Why Strong Families Are Central To Arizona’s Future.”

⁷⁷ Karen Friedman, Pension Rights Center (pensionrights.org), Washington, D.C., in a letter to Amy Dickinson published in the *Loveland Reporter-Herald*, January 29, 2019, p. 5B.

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.⁷⁸

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.

Again, parents considering a divorce must be informed of the huge and life-long impact divorce will have on their children. It is unwise, ignorant of the facts, disobedient to God, and cruel to the children for parents to not seek pastoral counseling and marital counseling to save their marriage. Most marriages can be maintained and improved **if** both wife and husband want to save their marriage.

Empirical studies and accompanying anecdotal evidence, e.g., my own many observations in over 60 years of ministry, reveal that many couples give up on their marriage before giving themselves an opportunity to succeed. Pertaining to the former, empirical research reported by the UK Marriage Foundation has discovered that

...the majority of couples who are unhappy when their first child is born are happy ten years later if they stay together.

Of parents who are unhappy at the time of the birth of their first child, seven in ten stay together and of these the majority (68 per cent) are happy ten years later.

Twenty seven per cent of unhappy parents who stay together end up

⁷⁸ “Was Dan Quayle right?” *Chicago Tribune*, March 21, 1993, Section 4, p. 2.

‘extremely happy,’ rating happiness with their relationship a top mark of seven out of seven.

With rates of family breakdown at record levels in the UK, the research suggests too many couples are giving up on their marriages before they have given them a chance to succeed.

Harry Benson, research director of Marriage Foundation, commented.... Most marriages have their unhappy moments, but apart from the fortunately extremely rare cases where the relationship involves abuse, most couples can work through the difficulties to be happy later on....

Sir Paul Coleridge, former High Court Judge and founder of Marriage Foundation commented: “With family breakdown especially in the first ten years at peak levels, this is really important, myth busting research.

“This study shows that because a couple is having a tough time adjusting to the demands of children, does not mean they will not come through it and end up with a really high quality, high satisfaction relationship in the long term.

“The problem lies in the misconceptions around the nature of long-term relationships. They do not just happen. Just because each party is passionate about the other at the start does not automatically mean they will remain for ever at that high octane level without effort and without periods of unhappiness.

“Talk to anyone who has a satisfying relationship twenty years on and they will tell you that it has had to be forged by sensitive, hard work by both sides over time. And success brings a reward beyond price which the whole family benefit from, especially the children.

“Keeping your relationship working and going forward is [humanly speaking] the far and away the best and most important ingredient in your child’s development.”⁷⁹

Notice carefully what has occurred in these marriages. The husband and wife chose to

⁷⁹ The Marriage Foundation, “Couples on the Brink,” https://marriagefoundation.org.uk/research/couples-on-the-brink/?_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9cYBRdkCgJYtDY6R9cJy_IKIoFzg8FBw3KPewL13XEkpSf9KYkwB4h5Kmxj-D2XinQ6gJfa9R7YNzuiCooPwELXWDFlg&_hsmi=139012367 (Accessed 07/10/2025) See also John Stonestreet and Dr. Timothy D. Padgett, “No-Fault Divorce Ignores Data, Science, and Stories.” *Break Point Daily*, Colson Center for Christian Worldview, February 24, 2022. https://breakpoint.org/no-fault-divorce-avoids-data-and-harms-children/?_hsenc=p2ANqtz-g6CuNR8rJKDUI3HA3CceJmek1cGU38aTVxT2flrEO7R2bFFyFz7r0Fy2sSkanHocE7XKET13skXsZUt-a567_j7dT5w&_hsmi=204948249 (Accessed 07/10, 2025)

stay together for unspecified reasons, but one of the reasons was for the sake of the child(ren), and notice how God blessed their choice: They grew to have a better relationship in which they could rejoice, and their children benefitted greatly.

How can we say that God blessed them, since we don't know from these reports whether the couple were Christians? We can easily draw this conclusion because of God's Word. In the Bible we read that Jesus said, "your Father in heaven...causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:45) In historic Christian theology, this is called God's common grace to all human beings, i.e., God's blessings on all people that they have not earned, whether or not they acknowledge Him. The Apostle James further explains that "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...." (James 1:17) Common grace is distinguished from the special grace God gives for those who believe in and follow Him.

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 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.*"⁸⁰ [Emphasis Tennant's] Churches also provide opportunities for Godly men to interact with children who lack a significant male figure in their lives.

⁸⁰ Tennant, "Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce," p. 42.

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.”⁸¹ 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, which is one of the reasons to obey God and marry only a believer in Jesus Christ. I’ve seen the toughest marital situations resolved and those marriages restored in and through 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) Indeed, they are!

Always consider the children, and don’t let others fail to do so. Again, strong science illustrates the teaching of God’s Word, in this case why he hates divorce. (Malachi 2:16) Quoting Wallerstein, Glenn T. Stanton adds,

While not the only one, Judith Wallerstein is the earliest scholar to examine carefully divorce’s impact on a large population of children, and she did so over nearly three decades. She poignantly explains in the culminating journal article of her life’s work,⁸² “Hardly any of our subjects described a happy childhood; in fact, a number of children told us that ‘the day they divorced was the day my childhood ended.’”⁸³

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.

In Jesus 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.

⁸¹ Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 42.

⁸² Glenn T. Stanton, “A deep and lasting wound: New advanced research shows divorce brings long-term harm for adult children,” [WORLD, May 27, 2025](#).

⁸³ Judith S. Wallerstein, “THE UNEXPECTED LEGACY OF DIVORCE: Report of a 25-Year Study,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 2004. Vol. 21. No. 3, p. 361, also the source of the quote by Glenn T. Stanton in “A deep and lasting wound.”

(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, Christ Jesus our Lord and only Savior, 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 his perfect 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; cf. John 16:33) 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 website at <https://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. There is a huge difference between those who divorce and have nothing to do with God and his church, contrasted with those who turn to God and become an active part of the church, the body of Christ, through whom the Lord works individually and corporately to bless and help us in all the ways we need to be and mature in Christ Jesus in order to accomplish his redemptive purposes in and throughout his creation. We need to read and heed his Word, in particular the following passages pertaining to the subject before us.

“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)

[The Holy Spirit led the Apostle Paul to write] “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)

[Jesus said] “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

[Jesus also comforted his disciples when he said] “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)