

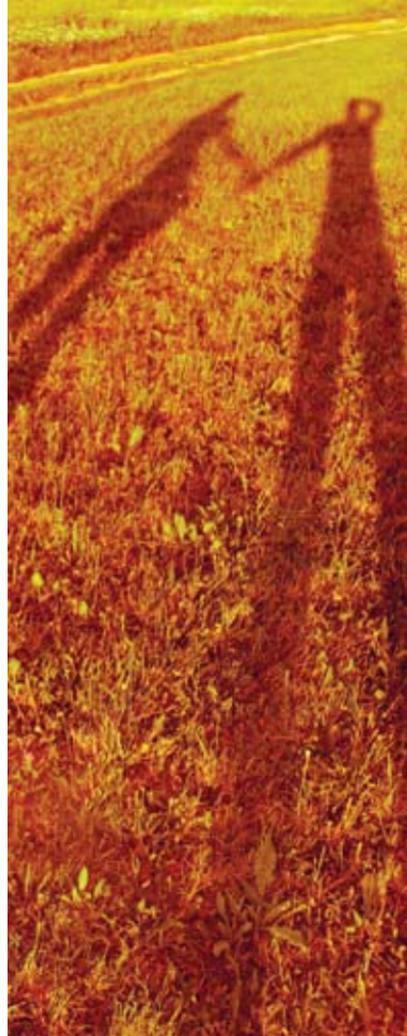


SHOULD  
I GET A  
DIVORCE?

Things You Should Know Before You Call the Attorney

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**NO COUPLE GOES INTO MARRIAGE THINKING THEY’LL BE THE ONES WHO WON’T MAKE IT.** Certainly, at your wedding, you thought you were promising a love that would last a lifetime. Now, for reasons you may not fully understand, that dream seems shattered.

As you try to understand the pain and determine what to do, divorce may look like an appealing way out. “After all,” you might reason, “life is full of second chances. Perhaps I simply married the wrong person, and Mr. or Ms. Right is still out there somewhere.” You may think you were too young when you married, or that you never really loved your spouse. Or maybe you are just tired of the arguing, tired of the lack of communication, tired of the coldness in your relationship. Perhaps you simply want out—period. Or maybe you are hoping against hope that your marriage can be salvaged.

Before you bail out of your marriage, carefully consider what you’ll be diving into. Most people are not prepared for the challenges of post-divorce life.

This booklet is designed to help you understand the effects of divorce before you make that choice, to give insight into what you—and your children—will face. By providing solid facts, it will help you make a more informed decision.

Be encouraged that no matter how hopeless it seems, there’s a possibility your marriage can be saved. It’s our sincere desire that your marriage will be transformed into the loving relationship you hoped it would be when you first said, “I do.”

## Who Gets Divorced?

Bill was a pillar in his small farming community, Melissa the faithful housewife.<sup>1</sup> They were a good Christian family, and she was looking forward to their upcoming 25th wedding anniversary. Melissa was in shock the night Bill came home and told her he had found “the love of his life” and was moving out. She literally spent the next year crying, unable to care for their 16-year-old daughter.

Unfortunately, Melissa’s story is not uncommon. While the divorce rate in America has leveled off and even decreased slightly in the past few years, the divorce rate is still twice as high as it was in 1960.<sup>2</sup> It’s estimated that for couples marrying today, the lifetime probability of divorce or separation remains between 40 and 50 percent before one partner dies, although this percentage is significantly lower for those who marry after age 21, graduate college and are religiously committed.<sup>5</sup> More than one million children a year experience their parents’ divorce.<sup>4</sup> And a recent survey reported that the divorce rate among Christians is now the same as or higher than in the broader culture.<sup>5</sup> Almost everyone knows someone who is either divorced or is a child of divorced parents. In fact, it seems rare to find young adults whose parents are still married. Divorce has become widely accepted. The growing acceptance of divorce has made it seem easier and all the more tempting.

Research shows the majority of marriages ending in divorce have average levels of happiness and conflict.<sup>6</sup> In other words, these are not deeply troubled, physically or emotionally abusive relationships, although even those are not always irreversibly broken.

In short, most of the marriages that end in divorce are just plain average, or “good



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enough." Instead of throwing in the towel, these average marriages could be improved over time—if the spouses stayed together.

Is your relationship one of these normal but—at least at this time—unhappy marriages? Could it be improved and saved from divorce? If so, then this booklet is for you. Before you say, "No way!" please continue reading.

### **How Would Divorce Affect Me?**

Sherry and Rob tried to spare their children the details of their breakup. Their marital problems were further complicated by Rob's affair with the secretary at the church he was pastoring. Without a college education, Sherry was forced to move back in with her parents, where she continues to live 12 years later. At one point, she attempted to recover the \$100,000 in child support Rob hadn't paid over time but was only able to get \$18,500—barely enough to pay a few of the bills that had been piling up.

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Sherry's story points out one all-too-real fact of divorce: Post-divorce families usually suffer financially. Studies show that women experiencing divorce face roughly a 30 percent decline in the standard of living they enjoyed while married, and men show a 10 percent decline.<sup>7</sup> The consistency of this finding caused one researcher to conclude: "However 'prepared' for marital disruption women increasingly may be, they are not prepared in ways sufficient to cushion the economic cost."<sup>8</sup>

And remember—that's all after the fact. The divorce itself can be a financial hurdle. While some divorce proceedings are relatively inexpensive, the fees can soar. Each case will vary. Attorney John Crouch describes it this way:

You can get [a divorce] for under \$10,000 per spouse in lawyer fees if you're lucky and if both the spouses and their lawyers are reasonable and fair. [This does not include what the divorce] does to the standard of living, [or] having to pay [child] support, [or] the expenses of visitation. But you really can't predict [even] that. . . . Either side can pull all kinds of stuff in court that just makes both the lawyers waste time until one client runs out of money. I

just finished one case where they settled, but then the husband had to spend \$70,000 just to enforce the settlement agreement!<sup>9</sup>

But there's more to life than money. There are many other areas where men and women are affected by divorce. With more than 30 years of research, we now know divorce seldom leads to a better life. Consider that:

- Life expectancies for divorced men and women are significantly lower than for married people (who have the longest life expectancies).<sup>10</sup>
- A recent study found that those who were unhappy but stayed married were more likely to be happy five years later than those who divorced.<sup>11</sup>
- The health consequences of divorce are so severe that a Yale researcher concluded that "being divorced and a nonsmoker is slightly less dangerous than smoking a pack a day and staying married."<sup>12</sup>
- After a diagnosis of cancer, married people are most likely to recover, while the divorced are least likely to recover,<sup>13</sup> indicating that the emotional trauma of divorce has a long-term impact on the physical health of the body.
- Men and women both suffer a decline in mental health following divorce, but researchers have found that women are more greatly affected.<sup>14</sup> Some of the mental health indicators impacted by divorce include depression, hostility, self-acceptance, personal growth and positive relations with others.

People often view divorce as a way to end the fighting. But the problems usually don't go away after divorce. Often, anger and animosity only increase when a divorce occurs. And the problems aren't solved by a second marriage. As Dr. Mark Hoffman, a counselor in private practice, reported, "I would say 35 to 40 percent of my time is spent with those who are arguing, bickering or in court over issues after their divorce. The problems are still there, but they have to deal with attorneys, judges and psychologists and are trying to solve the same old problems. You will find those problems still prevail in their second marriage—[but] now they have to deal with two spouses."<sup>15</sup>

Second marriages have a much higher rate of divorce than first marriages. As Hoffman said, "What you are arguing over during the divorce or what led you to the divorce and what frustrated you [so much] that you wanted to quit and move out—these factors will go on to haunt you after the divorce. If you get into another relationship, you are going to think about running away from that one [too]."

Divorced parents also suffer in their relationships with their children. In most cases, non-custodial fathers are unable to maintain the level of involvement with their children that they previously had. And the damaged relationship does not always heal when the child becomes an adult. As researchers found, "Nearly two-thirds of young adults from disrupted families had poor relationships with their fathers."<sup>16</sup> And a substantial minority of these young adults had poor relationships with *both* parents.

These findings led the researchers to conclude that "[M]any of these young people are especially vulnerable to influences outside the family, such as from boyfriends or girlfriends, other peers, adult authority figures and the media . . . From the viewpoint of an individual

parent, the prospect that divorce means one is likely to have a poor relationship with one's grown offspring should give the parent who is contemplating separation some pause. The knowledge that this is often the case might even lead to some parents trying harder to make their marriages work or at least to maintain reasonable post-divorce relationships with their children and former spouses."<sup>17</sup>

### **How Could Divorce Affect My Kids?**

Many years ago, the myth began to circulate that if parents are unhappy, the kids are unhappy, too. So divorce could help both parent and child. "What's good for mom or dad is good for the children," it was assumed. But we now have an enormous amount of research on divorce and children, all pointing to the same stubborn truth: Kids suffer when moms and dads split up. (And divorce doesn't make mom and dad happier, either.)

The reasons behind the troubling statistics and the always-present emotional trauma are simple but profound. As licensed counselor and therapist Steven Earll writes:

Children (and adult children) have the attitude that their parents should be able to work through and solve any issue. Parents, who have given the children life, are perceived by the children as very competent people with supernatural abilities to meet the needs of the children. No problem should be too great for their parents to handle. For a child, divorce shatters this basic safety and belief concerning the parents' abilities to care for them and to make decisions that truly consider their well-being.

Children have the strong belief that there is only one right family relationship, and that is Mom and Dad being together. Any other relationship configuration presents a conflict or betrayal of their basic understanding of life. In divorce, children [tend to] resent both the custodial and absent parent."<sup>18</sup>

While virtually every child suffers the lost relationship and lost security described above, for many, the emotional scars have additional, more visible consequences. More than 30 years of research continues to reveal the negative effects of divorce on children. Most of these measurable effects are calculated in increased risks. In other words, while divorce does not mean these effects will definitely occur in your *child*, it does greatly increase the *risks*. The odds are simply against your kids if you divorce.



**CHILDREN OF  
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Research comparing children of divorced parents to children with married parents shows:

- Children from divorced homes suffer academically. They experience high levels of behavioral problems. Their grades suffer, and they are less likely to graduate from high school.<sup>19</sup>
- Kids whose parents divorce are substantially more likely to be incarcerated for committing a crime as a juvenile.<sup>20</sup>
- Because the custodial parent's income drops substantially after a divorce, children in divorced homes are almost five times more likely to live in poverty than are children with married parents.<sup>21</sup>
- Teens from divorced homes are much more likely to engage in drug and alcohol use, as well as sexual intercourse than are those from intact families.<sup>22</sup>

Before you say, "Not my kid," remember that the children and teens represented in these statistics are normal kids, probably not much different from yours. Their parents didn't think they would get involved in these things, either. Again, we're looking at increased *risks*.

A few more statistics to consider:

- Children from divorced homes experience illness more frequently and recover from sickness more slowly.<sup>23</sup> They are also more likely to suffer child abuse.<sup>24</sup>
- Children of divorced parents suffer more frequently from symptoms of psychological

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distress.<sup>25</sup> And the emotional scars of divorce last into adulthood.<sup>26</sup>

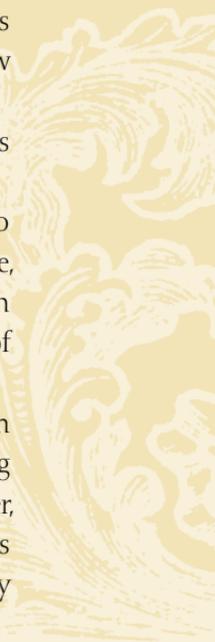
The scope of this last finding—children suffer emotionally from their parents’ divorce—has been largely underestimated. Obviously, not every child of divorce commits crime or drops out of school. Some do well in school and even become high achievers. However, we now know that even these children experience deep and lasting emotional trauma.

For *all* children, their parents’ divorce colors their view of the world and relationships for the rest of their lives.

Psychologist Judith Wallerstein followed a group of children of divorce from the 1970s into the 1990s. Interviewing them at 18 months and then 5, 10, 15 and 25 years after the divorce, she expected to find that they had bounced back. But what she found was dismaying: Even 25 years after the divorce, these children continued to experience substantial expectations of failure, fear of loss, fear of change and fear of conflict.<sup>27</sup> Twenty-five years!

The children in Wallerstein’s study were especially challenged when they began to form their own romantic relationships. As Wallerstein explains, “Contrary to what we have long thought, the major impact of divorce does not occur during childhood or adolescence. Rather, it rises in adulthood as serious romantic relationships move center stage . . . Anxiety leads many [adult children of divorce] into making bad choices in relationships, giving up hastily when problems arise, or avoiding relationships altogether.”<sup>28</sup>

Other researchers confirm Wallerstein’s findings.<sup>29</sup> Specifically, compared to kids from intact homes, children who experienced their parents’ divorce view premarital sex and cohabitation





more favorably.<sup>30</sup> (This is disturbing news given that cohabiting couples have more breakups, greater risk of domestic violence<sup>31</sup> and are more likely to experience divorce.<sup>32</sup>)

Behind each of these statistics is a life—a child, now an adult, still coping with the emotions brought on by the divorce.

As Wallerstein put it, “The kids [in my study] had a hard time remembering the pre-divorce family . . . but what they remembered about the post-divorce years was their sense that they had indeed been abandoned by both parents, that their nightmare [of abandonment] had come true.”<sup>33</sup>

Parents tend to want to have their own needs met after a divorce—to find happiness again with someone new. But not only do the old problems often resurface for the adults, new problems are added for the children. As Wallerstein observed, “It’s not that parents love their children less or worry less about them. It’s that they are fully engaged in rebuilding their own lives—economically, socially and sexually. Parents’ and children’s needs are often out of sync for many years after the breakup.”<sup>34</sup> Children again feel abandoned as parents pursue better relationships after the breakup.”

Feelings of abandonment and confusion are only compounded when one or both parents find a new spouse. A second marriage brings complications and new emotions for children—not to mention new

stepsiblings, stepparents and stepgrandparents, who often are in competition for the parent's attention. (And the adjustment can be even more difficult—because it is the adults who choose new families, not the children.)

Lilly expressed it this way: “My loss was magnified as my father remarried and adopted a new ‘family.’ Despite attempts on my part to keep in touch, we live in different cities, and his life now revolves around his new family with infrequent contact with me. This has only increased the feelings of abandonment and alienation from the divorce.”

And the high rate of second-marriage divorces can leave children reeling from yet another loss.

Full “recovery” is nearly impossible for children because of the dynamic nature of family life. While you and your ex-spouse's lives may go on separately with relatively little thought, your children will think about their loss almost every day. And 25 years after the fact, they will certainly be influenced by it. Life itself will remind them of the loss at even the happiest moments. As Earl explains: “Children never get over divorce. It is a great loss that is in their lives forever. It is like a grief that is never over. All special events, such as holidays, plays, sports, graduations, marriages, births of children, etc., bring up the loss created by divorce as well as the family relationship conflicts that result from the ‘extended family’ celebrating any event.”<sup>55</sup>

What parents see as a quick way out often results in emotional damage that the children will carry for 30 years or more. Divorce is no small thing to children. It is the violent ripping apart of their parents, a loss of stability and often a complete shock. While we often think of children as resilient, going through such trauma is a lot to ask of our kids.

In light of the fact that most marriages heading for divorce can be salvaged and turned into great marriages, parents should take a long pause before choosing divorce. While it may seem like a solution to you, it's not an easy out for you or your kids.

### **Is There Hope for My Marriage?**

Often we think an unhappy couple has only two options:

1. Stay together and be miserable.
2. Get a divorce.

But there is a third option, and many couples successfully take this other road. In an exciting new study, couples participating in a national survey were asked to rate their marriage on a scale of one to seven, with one being very unhappy and seven being very happy. Those who rated their marriages a “one” had incredible turnarounds just five years later—if they stayed together. In fact, 77 percent of those giving their marriage a very unhappy “one” rated their marriage as a “seven” after five years.<sup>56</sup> Was there some breakthrough therapy involved? No. In fact, many did relatively little—they just “stuck it out” and things got better.

As mentioned earlier, another study found that about 60 percent of marriages that ended in divorce were not bad marriages, but average.<sup>57</sup> They had average levels of positive interactions and average levels of conflict. Basically, these marriages were “good enough” but could be improved. Most marriages go through emotional ups and downs—times of great happiness and times of boredom and fatigue.

To have good marriages, we need to ride out the “lows” and learn from those times so that the relationship can be strengthened. If your relationship is at a low point and you wonder what happened to the spark, there is good news. It’s not too late to revitalize your relationship.

### **What Makes Marriages Get Better?**

Researchers followed up on those couples who rated their marriages as unhappy at first and happy five years later. Here’s what the couples told them were the reasons for the dramatic turnaround:<sup>58</sup>

#### *Waiting.*

Since many couples have unhappy marriages due to outside pressures (like a job loss or the demands of young children), the passage of time changed those circumstances. Things just naturally got better again.

#### *Working at it.*

Many of the problems in marriage are a result of poor communication. Some couples told the researchers they simply learned to take small steps—like listening to each other—which resulted in happier marriages. For example, husbands learned to compliment wives, and wives learned to encourage husbands.



*Personal happiness/perspective change in one spouse.*

Sometimes, one spouse simply decided not to base all of his or her happiness on the mood of the other spouse. Instead, one spouse took up a hobby or simply made an attitude adjustment that allowed him or her to be more patient and accepting of the other.

*Credible threat of consequences for bad behavior.*

Some of the marriages were initially very unhappy because the husbands were engaged in “bad behaviors”—out late drinking with the boys, infidelity or even occasional abuse.<sup>59</sup> Just as Dr. James Dobson advises in his book *Love Must Be Tough*, these wives took firm action and let their husbands know they would not tolerate such behavior. The husbands changed.

There are many ways to improve your marriage. Today, there are hundreds of tools

focused on ways to build strong, healthy relationships. A few examples include weekend getaway-style marriage conferences by Family Life Today or Marriage Encounter, film series and seminars hosted by local churches under the title "Marriage Enrichment" and mentoring programs through local churches. There are also many resources available from Focus on the Family, some of which are listed at the end of this booklet.

### **How Should a Christian View Marriage and Divorce?**

God, the Creator of humanity and of marriage itself, has laid out His plan for marriage as a lifelong union. God knows this design is the best. When we stray from His plan, as we have seen in the studies mentioned above, the results are damaging on many levels.

Unfortunately, the divorce rate in the church is comparable to that of the culture at large. Many Christians see nothing wrong with divorce, at least in their own particular situation. But the Bible clearly addresses marriage and divorce.

Marriage is the first institution created by God. God made the first man, Adam, but declared that it was not good for Adam to be alone. He then brought to Adam all the animals, which Adam named, but "no companion suitable for him" was found (Genesis

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**[MARRIAGE] WAS  
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2:20, NLT). God was revealing to Adam his incomplete nature. God then created a woman, Eve, for Adam. He blessed them and their union and gave them the earth to rule over. (See Genesis 1:27-28.) The creation of marriage occurred prior to sin's entrance into the world. It was a part of God's perfect design for mankind.

Through the prophets, God emphasized three principles: 1) marriage is sacred, 2) God hates divorce and 3) marriage is designed to produce children of good character. (See Malachi 2:13-16.)

Jesus underscored the importance and sacredness of lifelong marriage in His own teachings. (See Matthew 19:6.)

The apostle Paul further taught that the marital relationship is to be an ongoing demonstration of the sacrificial love that Christ showed His church. (See Ephesians 5:21-33.)

Let's look at this issue more closely. Specifically, what does the Bible tell us about divorce? Malachi 2:13-16 gives us a clear look into God's heart for marriage:

Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce,"

says the LORD God of Israel.

Jesus Christ reiterated the importance and permanence of marriage. Matthew 19:3-6 (NIV) says, "Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'"

"Haven't you read," He replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?" So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Because, as an attorney, I've represented many people going through divorce, I understand why God says, "I hate [it]!" Divorce is the tearing apart of the foundation of all stable societies—the family. Sometimes, it's necessary. Sometimes, it's even unavoidable. (In Colorado, for example, if one spouse files for divorce, the other cannot stop it from occurring.) Nonetheless, it's important that we in the Body of Christ encourage those in troubled marriages to seek counseling and restoration—because most divorces are neither necessary nor unavoidable.

But are there any cases in which the Bible *allows* divorce? Many Christians disagree about whether the Bible allows divorce and/or remarriage. If you are concerned about whether you have biblical grounds for divorce, you will need to commit the matter to prayer and study. You should also seek out counsel from your own pastor and, ideally, a licensed Christian counselor. The question of sin cannot be taken lightly. But biblical grounds may exist:

- (1) When one's mate is guilty of sexual immorality and is unwilling to repent and live faithfully with the marriage partner. Jesus' words in Matthew 19:8-9 indicate that divorce (and remarriage) in this circumstance is acceptable. That passage reads:

"Why then," [the Pharisees] asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for *marital unfaithfulness*, and marries [or, 'in order to marry'] another woman commits adultery." (Emphasis added)

However, divorce is not *required*. If your spouse has committed adultery, divorce is morally *allowed*, but not required. Many couples have been able to rebuild their marriages even after such a devastating blow.

- (2) When one spouse is not a Christian, and that spouse willfully and permanently deserts the Christian spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15).

Dr. James Dobson's position is that divorce and remarriage appear to be justified in Scripture only in a few instances.<sup>40</sup>

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, please pray carefully about your decision to divorce,

and be open to God's leading. (God's heart is to heal marriages.)

If your spouse is the one deciding on divorce, you may not be able to stop him or her through current divorce laws. However, you can try to persuade your spouse to consider a legal separation first, which would give you both more time to consider the issue.

Pray that God will open the lines of communication between you and your spouse and that He will restore the love in your relationship. And pray for patience and a forgiving spirit. Try to resist the temptation to say angry words to your spouse or do things that would push him or her further away. Restoration does occur even in the most hostile circumstances, but it is more difficult when harsh words have passed between you.

### **Dealing With the Bigger Problems in Marriage**

Since you are reading this booklet, you are probably hurting, confused and disappointed



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with your relationship. Some hurts require specialized consideration. Those who have been deeply betrayed through infidelity, drug and alcohol abuse, or domestic violence may need to get specific advice and help to know what to do next.

It's important to know that marriages have survived these terrible problems and have come back from the brink. As Hoffman explained, "Ninety-eight percent of the people headed toward divorce have no idea that you don't have to file for divorce. If there is domestic violence, psychological problems, depression, infidelity or adultery, if anything like that happens, they [still] don't have to go immediately [and] get a divorce."<sup>41</sup>

The process of healing is difficult and slow, but it can be done when both spouses are willing. The next few pages outline general thoughts about these issues, but the answers to these problems cannot adequately be addressed here. *Please call one of our counselors who can give you more personalized help.* He or she will talk with you and offer as much help as possible, and will then refer you to a local counselor who can continue working with you in person.

### **What About Adultery?**

Julia and Pete<sup>42</sup>, who talked to Dr. Dobson about their experience, are living examples of a good marriage, but it wasn't always that way. Early in their marriage, Julia—who was from a blue-collar background—felt unaccepted by Pete's wealthy parents. Even Pete seemed uncomfortable with her background. Ten years and three children later, Julia found that Pete's best friend—their next-door neighbor—gave her the admiration she so desperately wanted. The attraction between them soon turned into repeated sexual encounters. Julia's affair almost

destroyed the marriage.

Fortunately, Pete's commitment to the marriage withstood the months it took Julia to end the affair. And his expressed love for her helped her overcome the guilt that almost drove her away. Through intense counseling and time, trust was restored. Pete has learned how to show his appreciation for Julia, and Julia discovered that Pete's character was far more admirable than that of the man who only made her feel good for his own gain.

Having experienced the horrible consequences of shattered trust, Julia offers this advice: "Once you have confirmed [the attraction for someone else] in any way, from that moment you are walking on hot coals. You'd better run from that person. It's just going to lead to heartbreak and heartache for everyone."<sup>45</sup> Julia and Pete now have a restored marriage. It wasn't easy; but as they proved, it can be done.

In *Love Must Be Tough*, Dr. Dobson deals directly with the issue of adultery. This book sets out general principles for saving a marriage in which one spouse is drifting away. (The principles also apply to situations other than adultery.) This book points out the common reactions of the "innocent" spouse (including pleading, panic, appeasement and passivity), and how those reactions often serve to drive the drifting spouse further away.

If you are fighting for your marriage and want to restore a relationship that has been hurt by infidelity, we strongly encourage you to read this book. You must be smart about handling this issue. Natural reactions can further damage the relationship; but as Julia and Pete found, there is hope if you are willing to take the necessary steps.

## What About Abuse?

While physical abuse between spouses is relatively rare compared to abuse by boyfriends and girlfriends<sup>44</sup>, it does occur and is a serious matter. **If you are being abused by your spouse, you must get to a safe place immediately!** Take your children and go to a trusted friend or relative's home. If that is not an option, check into a hotel, or call a church in your area and ask for a recommended safe house or domestic violence shelter. While you should let your spouse know you have moved out, do not let him or her know where you have gone. The primary need is the safety of you and your children.

Once you are in a safe place, you will have many tough decisions to make. A booklet like this cannot give you the answers for your specific situation. Please contact someone who can listen and interact with you to meet your needs in a personal way. Do not try to cope with this alone!

We are here to help. Call us at 800-A-FAMILY (232-6459) and ask to speak to someone in our Counseling department. One of our counselors will talk to you at no



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charge and give you some initial advice to help with your immediate concerns. He or she will then refer you to a local counselor who can help you work through your situation.

It is possible for an abusive spouse to change, but extensive counseling is usually required. As Dr. Dobson advises, do not be quick to return if your spouse has abused you. A simple "I'm sorry, I won't do it again" is not enough in this case. Your spouse must demonstrate change for a prolonged period, and you must feel completely safe before you return.

Remember: No matter what you have done, no one has the right to abuse you. Many victims of abuse experience false guilt or a sense of responsibility for the abuse. This is something a counselor can help you work through. In many cases, there is hope for reconciliation. But you must recognize abuse for the serious offense that it is. Please get help if you find yourself in this circumstance.

### **What About Addictions?**

Another serious problem that causes marital stress is addiction by a spouse, including drug or alcohol addiction. Even nonviolent alcoholics can be verbally and emotionally difficult and hurtful. And the lapses in responsibility add stress to the sober spouse.

Another serious and increasing problem most often affects men. Pornography is readily available in our society, and the Internet has only maximized this problem. Like the alcoholic, some men will not admit they have a problem with pornography, or that it is even harmful.

Again, this booklet is not meant to help you with this kind of problem. If your spouse is involved in an addiction, it is important that you have someone to talk this over with. We

would be privileged to provide that support.

Please take this kind of problem seriously. Addictions are not easy to overcome, and it must start with your spouse's own desire to change. He or she will need a lot of support—not enabling. It may require tough love. Please call our Counseling department to talk over your specific situation and how best to address it. Also, we again recommend that you read Dr. Dobson's book *Love Must Be Tough*, as those principles may apply in your circumstance as well.

### **Where to Turn**

While we obviously cannot provide all the answers in this booklet for your personal situation, it is our sincere hope that the information you have just read will help you reconsider your options. Focus on the Family is committed to marriage as a lifelong union and to helping our culture understand the importance of marriage. We hope this resource has provided you with information and with hope for restoration.

Focus on the Family has a multitude of resources on marriage-building and divorce-related issues. A few of these are listed on the following page. If you would like to request these resources or need to speak to one of our counselors, please call 719-531-3400. Or you may go to our Web site ([family.org](http://family.org)), and place your request online.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### **Consequences of Divorce**

*Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society*, Glenn T. Stanton, (Pinon Press). This book is a concise presentation of the latest research on the hidden benefits of marriage and the serious consequences of its breakdown.

### **Restoring Your Marriage**

*Marriage Counseling*: When your marriage needs help, call 719-531-3400 to speak with a Focus on the Family counselor for a referral in your area.

### **Marriage Intensives**

*WinShape Marriage Retreats*

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Visit: [winshape.org/marriage](http://winshape.org/marriage)

WinShape Marriage is a safe haven for couples to rekindle passion, grow stronger and be restored. It's a place to put the world on hold, a place to be transformed.

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MARRIAGE.

Retrouvaille is a program designed to help heal and renew marriages that are troubled or have simply drifted apart. *Retrouvaille* means “rediscovery”—and the program offers the chance to rediscover yourself, your spouse and a loving relationship in your marriage.

*Please understand that this referral does not necessarily imply full endorsement. Though we try to avoid recommending ministries whose views and approach do not accord with our Christian principles, it is not always possible to ensure complete agreement in outlook.*

Smalley Relationship Center  
Gary Smalley  
1482 Lakeshore Dr.  
Branson, MO 65616  
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familylife.com

This ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ provides a special weekend away for married couples and for those contemplating marriage. Held in major motels nationwide, conferences offer workshops on stress, conflict and sex. Special classes for women only, men only and engaged couples are also presented. In addition, a video series for Canadian viewers and a Spanish manual are available.

### **Books**

- *Reconcilable Differences: Healing for Troubled Marriages*, Jim Talley, (Nelson). This book shows why it is worth the effort for troubled marriages to try again, and how it can be done. It shows that love can be rekindled, and gives specific directions for overcoming differences.
- *Straight Talk: What Men Need to Know/What Women Need to Understand*, Dr. James Dobson, (Word). This book will help men understand what it means to be a good father and husband.

### **Focus on the Family**

- *Love Must Be Tough*, Dr. James Dobson, (Multnomah). In his groundbreaking classic that popularized the “tough love” principle, Dr. Dobson offers practical help for the spouse who wants to hold the marriage together.
- *Breaking the Cycle of Divorce*, Dr. John Trent, (Focus on the Family/Tyndale). This book will help adult children of divorce to stop the cycle.
- *Before a Bad Goodbye: How to Turn Your Marriage Around*, Dr. Tim Clinton, (Word). This is a helpful book for those who feel that divorce might be a viable option to a marriage that doesn't seem to be working.
- *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*, Dr. Scott Stanley, (Jossey-Bass). Based on current research and the truths of Scripture, this book helps couples resolve conflict in healthy ways and build a strong, loving relationship.

### **Web Sites**

*Troubledwith.com* is a Focus on the Family Web site that helps people in crisis.  
[family.org/marriage](http://family.org/marriage)

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The personal stories in this booklet are real, though the names have been changed. These stories were gathered in a series of interviews conducted by Focus on the Family Research Assistant Heidi Ihrke.
- <sup>2</sup> David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "The State of Our Unions 2001," National Marriage Project, Rutgers, June 2001, p. 21, [marriage.rutgers.edu](http://marriage.rutgers.edu).
- <sup>3</sup> David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "The State of Our Unions 2007," National Marriage Project, Rutgers, July 2007, pp. 18, 20, [marriage.rutgers.edu](http://marriage.rutgers.edu).
- <sup>4</sup> Glenn T. Stanton, *Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society* (Colorado Springs: Pinon Press, 1997), p. 29; Judith Wallerstein, et al., *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), p. xxvi.
- <sup>5</sup> "Christians Are More Likely to Experience Divorce Than Are Non-Christians," Barna Research Group, December 21, 2000, [barna.org](http://barna.org).
- <sup>6</sup> Paul Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 220.
- <sup>7</sup> Atlee L. Stroup and Gene E. Pollock, "Economic Consequences of Marital Dissolution," *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 22 (1994): 7-54; Richard R. Peterson, "A Re-evaluation of the Economic Consequences of Divorce," *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 528-536. Peterson's data showed a 30 percent income decrease for women, but a 10 percent increase for men.
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- <sup>9</sup> John Crouch, "Virginia's No-Fault Divorce Reform Bill" (interview with John Crouch and Jim Parmelee on TV Channel 10, Fairfax, VA, [divorcereform.org](http://divorcereform.org)).
- <sup>10</sup> Robert Coombs, "Marital Status and Personal Well-being: A Literature Review," *Family Relations* 40 (1991):97-102; I. M. Joung, et al., "Differences in Self-Reported Morbidity by Marital Status and by Living Arrangement," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 23 (1994): 91-97.
- <sup>11</sup> Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 148.
- <sup>12</sup> Harold J. Morowitz, "Hiding in the Hammond Report," *Hospital Practice* (August 1975), p. 39.
- <sup>13</sup> James S. Goodwin, William C. Hunt, Charles R. Key and Jonathan M. Sarmet, "The Effect of Marital Status on Stage, Treatment, and Survival of Cancer Patients," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 258 (1987): 3125-3130.
- <sup>14</sup> Nadine F. Marks and James D. Lambert, "Marital Status Continuity and Change Among Young and Midlife Adults: Longitudinal Effects on Psychological Well-Being," *Journal of Family Issues* 19 (1998): 652-686.

- <sup>15</sup> Interview with Mark H. Hoffman, Ed.D., L.S.P., July 2001.
- <sup>16</sup> Nicholas Zill, *et al.*, "Long-term Effects of Parental Divorce on Parent-Child Relationships, Adjustment, and Achievement in Young Adulthood," *Journal of Family Psychology* 7 (1993): 91-103.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with Steven Earll, M.A., M.S., L.P.C., C.A.C. III, August 2001.
- <sup>19</sup> Nan Marie Astone and Sara S. McLanahan, "Family Structure, Parental Practices and High School Completion," *American Sociological Review* 56 (1991): 309-320.
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- <sup>21</sup> Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 82.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert L. Flewelling and Karl E. Bauman, "Family Structure as a Predictor of Initial Substance Use and Sexual Intercourse in Early Adolescence," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52 (1990): 171-181.
- <sup>23</sup> Jane Mauldon, "The Effects of Marital Disruption on Children's Health," *Demography* 27 (1990): 431-46, and Olle Lundberg, "The Impact of Childhood Living Conditions on Illness and Mortality in Adulthood," *Social Science and Medicine* 36 (1993): 1047-52, both as cited in Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).
- <sup>24</sup> Catherine Malkin and Michael Lamb, "Child Maltreatment: A Test of Sociobiological Theory," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 25 (1994): 121-133; Leslie Margolin, "Child Abuse and Mother's Boyfriends: Why the Overrepresentation?" *Child Abuse and Neglect* 16 (1992): 541-551.
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- <sup>26</sup> Wallerstein, *et al.*, 2000, pp. xxvii-xxix; Catherine E. Ross and John Mirowsky, "Parental Divorce, Life-Course Disruption, and Adult Depression," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61 (1999): 1034-1035.
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- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxix.
- <sup>29</sup> See Andrew J. Cherlin, P. Lindsey Chase-Lansdale and C. McRae, "Effects of Parental Divorce on Mental Health Through the Life Course," *American Sociological Review*, 63 (1998): 239-249; Catherine E. Ross and John Mirowsky, "Parental Divorce, Life-Course Disruption, and Adult Depression," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61 (1999): 1034-1035.

- <sup>50</sup> William G. Axinn and Arland Thornton, "The Influence of Parents' Marital Dissolutions on Children's Attitudes toward Family Formation," *Demography* 33 (1996): 66-81.
- <sup>51</sup> See Stanton, 1997, pp. 55-70; see also David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "Should We Live Together?" A Report of the National Marriage Project, 1999, marriage.rutgers.edu.
- <sup>52</sup> Alan Booth and David Johnson, "Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Success," *Journal of Family Issues* 9 (1988): 255-272; Paul Amato and Alan Booth, "The Consequences of Divorce for Attitudes toward Divorce and Gender Roles," *Journal of Family Issues* 12 (1991): 306-323.
- <sup>53</sup> Jane Meredith Adams, "Judith Wallerstein: Forget the Notion Divorce Won't Hurt Kids. It Will." *Biography* 1 (1997): 79-81.
- <sup>54</sup> Wallerstein, *et al.*, 2000, p. xxix.
- <sup>55</sup> Earl interview, August 2001.
- <sup>56</sup> Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 148.
- <sup>57</sup> Amato and Booth, 1997, p. 220.
- <sup>58</sup> Linda J. Waite, Don Browning, William J. Doherty, Maggie Gallagher, Ye Luo and Scott Stanley, "Does Divorce Make People Happy? Findings from a Study of Unhappy Marriages," Institute for American Values, 2002, americanvalues.org/UnhappyMarriages.pdf.
- <sup>59</sup> While women are also known to exhibit these negative behaviors, in this particular study it was the men who were "misbehaving."
- <sup>40</sup> There is a third instance in which Dr. Dobson believes remarriage is acceptable in Scripture. That instance is when an individual's divorce occurred prior to salvation.
- <sup>41</sup> Hoffman interview, July 2001.
- <sup>42</sup> This story is from an interview with Dr. James Dobson on the "Focus on the Family" broadcast, "Marriages That Survived Infidelity." The story is also told in chapter four of Betsy Holt and Mike Yorkey's *Always* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999).
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> Boyfriends are far more likely to physically abuse their mates than husbands are. See Jan E. Stets, "Cohabitation and Marital Aggression: The Role of Social Isolation," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 669-680. However, while marriage substantially reduces the risk for domestic violence, it does occur in some marriages and should be treated with all seriousness.





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