

## **Good Reasons to Stay Married**

In making the decision to divorce, couples must consider both the short-term and long-term impacts of their decision on themselves and the children. Like any major, life changing decision, divorce requires careful analysis. If after weighing all the pros and cons of divorce, a couple decides divorce is the only reasonable alternative, then Christian Mediations is ready and willing to assist with that decision.

One of the major impacts of divorce is on the children. Recently, a 25-year study of the impacts of divorce on children has been completed by Judith Wallerstein in her informative book *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: a Twenty-Five Year Landmark Study*. The information in this book is well-documented and worth reading for anyone contemplating divorce or having experienced divorce firsthand as a child of parents who divorced. Much of the information below is gleaned from Ms. Wallerstein's book. In addition, there are other impacts of divorce taken from a variety of sources that are presented below.

### **Physical and Financial Impacts of Divorce**

- Divorce is financially devastating to the family resulting in: enormous, unplanned expenses to unwind the marriage; a dividing up and sale of assets sometimes at unfavorable prices; a loss of future financial independence in retirement and life insurance protection; and a loss of productivity often for years after divorce.
- "Throughout the social science literature, we find an ever-present correlation between a breakdown in the family and increases in child poverty, juvenile delinquency, child abuse, poor academic performance, addictions, and health problems." (Patrick F. Fagan, Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, *The Positive Effects of Marriage: A Book of Charts*)
- People who stay married typically live ten years longer than those who divorce.

### **Anger Does not End with Divorce**

- Divorce often escalates the conflict between the parents and gives the parents permission to openly fight in front of the children. Most parents who remain together chose not to fight in front of the children to maintain a level of peace in the family.

- The underlying issues (e.g., anger, bitterness, resentment) are not dealt with in the divorce. The fighting rarely stops with the divorce. On the contrary, it continues and even escalates.
- Battles over custody or visitation can become an outlet for the parents' unresolved anger. Many parents come to believe that without the child, they have no one. This adds tremendous fuel to the fire and results in lengthy battles.

## **Diminished Parenting**

- Divorce results in diminished parenting: parents are less available and less organized; they prepare fewer dinners; there are fewer clean clothes; there are no regular household routines; there is less time for help with homework; and there are no soothing bedtime rituals.
- After divorce, family gatherings are severely reduced or eliminated. Waiting for the whole family to gather around the dinner table is no longer a priority. Holiday gatherings become logistical nightmares shuttling back and forth between households or are abandoned all together.
- After divorce, the child's needs are no longer paramount. Prior to divorce, the child's only "job" was to go to school, play, make friends and simply grow up. The child no longer occupies center stage and must help with the additional burdens placed on the family.

## **Loss of Marriage Modeling**

- Couples that stay together model the importance of commitment and perseverance in marriage. Those raised in intact marriages see first hand the ups and downs of marriage. This experience helps them to cope with unexpected changes and difficulties in their own marriages.
- "Our society underestimates the importance of an intact marriage in guiding the expectations and behaviors of the younger generation. Often times, adults of parents who stayed together will say they used their parents' example during difficult times to stay committed to their own marriages." (J. Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: a Twenty-five Year Landmark Study* (New York, Hyperion, 2000), p. 82.)

- Parents who chose to stay together provide a powerful model of stability for their children. Consciously or unconsciously, adults of intact families will say to themselves, “If my parents found a way to stay together, then so can we.” (Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, p. 83.)

## **Children’s View of Divorce**

- Divorce is a different experience for adults and children. Parents view divorce as a remedy to an unhappy relationship. Children do not share this view and have great difficulty accepting the change in circumstances.
- Children are rarely told the real reasons for divorce. Children typically hear a “real estate explanation” of divorce: “Your mother is going to live here and I am going to live there.” (Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, p. 93.)
- “Many people in difficult marriages believe their children will be better off if the unhappy parents separate. However, case studies have shown that children remain relatively content even while their parents are suffering in an unhappy marriage.” (J. Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, p.27.)
- “If children had the vote, almost all would vote to maintain their parents’ marriage.” (Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, p. 51.)

## **Loss of Childhood**

- Case studies have shown that children of divorce rarely talk about play time as a major part of their childhood as opposed to children from intact families who have vivid memories of exciting adventures they had as children. One child of divorced parents put it this way: “The day my parents divorced is the day my childhood ended.” (Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, p. 26.)
- Usually one or both of the parents are emotionally unstable and/or depressed after the divorce. “Divorce often leads to a partial or complete collapse in an adult’s ability to parent for months and sometimes years after the breakup. In many cases, the children are forced into the position of becoming a caregiver for one or both of the parents who are not able to function.” (Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, p. 13)

## **Fear of Conflict and Commitment**

- Children of divorced parents are typically afraid of conflict. They tend to assume the worst and either suppress their anger until it blows sky high or run away and withdraw from the conflict. Parents who stay together learn how to resolve conflict and model appropriate behavior to their children.
- “Children of divorced parents tend to be more passive in dealing with their own marital difficulties.” During a crisis in the marriage, the men typically wait on the sidelines for the woman to make a decision. They lack confidence to lead the family or handle the high emotions of their spouse during a stressful time. (Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, p. 77.)
- Children of divorced parents are fearful of commitment. They lack self-confidence in choosing a mate and lack experience on how to weather the storms of life in marriage.

## **Conclusions on Divorce**

- Divorce is not a one-time event. The physical, emotional, and financial impacts of divorce are deeply felt by those involved and future generations.
- Just as a strong, healthy marriage impacts future generations towards commitment and perseverance, a divorced marriage is a heavy weight leading future generations towards fear and failure.
- Marriage is hard work. Parents who make a conscious decision to stay together and pass that onto children have demonstrated importance of marriage to children.
- Marriage is the union of two people. Children see parents as a twosome. Image of parents together as a loving couple is forever lost with divorce.