

HEADING OFF DIVORCE

1. DIVORCE — A NATIONAL PROBLEM

A. After reaching a peak in 1981 of 5.3 per 1000 people, the divorce rate has been steadily declining. Nonetheless, it is still the highest in the western world with 3.6% per 1000 people as of April 2006. We are talking about all marriages including remarriages. According to the New York Times (April 19, 2005), after peaking in 1980 with 41% of all marriages ending in divorce, the number had decreased to 31% in 2002. The decline is the result of the aging of the U.S. population, an increasing number of people choosing to live together, without marrying (now at 8.1% of couples), and the growing number choosing to remain single.

B. The aftermath of divorce is almost always negative.

1. It usually involves a sense of personal failure.

2. Many regret the decision, wishing they had remained married and had worked harder at solutions. Researchers find that more than 50% of divorced women and almost 50% of divorced men, within one year of their divorce regret the decision and feel they acted impulsively.

3. Children often suffer significantly through divorce. 60% of those who divorce have children under 18, totaling about 2,000,000 per year. Young males appear to be particularly effected.

4. Juvenile crime is without doubt related to home failure. One study states that if homes generally had a "strong father figure" the juvenile crime rate would plummet.

5. There is an increase number of those living together without marriage (doubling in a recent 10-year period), as well as an increase propaganda for singleness. It is estimated that about 10% of those over 20 will never marry. One study reports 50% of blacks and 38% of whites over 18 in the U.S. are presently unmarried.

6. Many of those who are married will choose to remain childless (some studies estimate 15%). Reasons are varied, but the poor record of marriages no doubt has a part.

II. DIVORCE — A CHURCH PROBLEM

A. This reality of our age will not go away if we just close our eyes! More and more of our families in the Church are touched by it.

B. These are real people with real needs who cannot and should not be relegated to some "second-class" category because they have had (or are having) marriage problems. The Church is obligated to work with them and help them to go on to develop their potential for service and growth in Christ.

C. In a recent year, 32% of the marriages were re-marriages. increasingly, the Church will come into contact with persons who have experienced multiple marriages. It is estimated that about 40% of those presently marrying will divorce, increasing to 60% if it is a second marriage.

III. THE CHALLENGE OF PREVENTION

As the saying goes, "the best defense is a good offense." While attention must be given to repairing and salvaging where divorce has occurred, even more importantly, we must work to preclude divorce in the first place.

IV. THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN PREVENTION

A. A well thought—out Biblically-based teaching program at all age levels on marriage and the responsibilities of marriage needs to be introduced throughout the Bible school and class offerings of the Church.

B. Every minister needs to prepare a thorough program of pre-marriage counseling and demand that all persons coming to him to be married must experience this program.

C. Danger signs of troubles that occur in marriage need to be individuated and the Church mobilized to help early on, rather than as a last ditch effort (such as sleeping separately, seeking ways to be apart, irritability in public, decreasing church activity, decreased contact with friends).

D. Good reading material on marriage and the home in the form of tracts, periodicals and books need to be made readily available, and publicly displayed.

V. THE ROLE OF THE HOME IN PREVENTION

A. Christian parents need to be impressed with their function as role models.

B. Special importance needs to be given to the emotional and communication contents of the home.

C. The home needs to become a multipurpose center for the fulfilling of social, physical, intellectual, psychological, and spiritual needs rather than a rest stop and a filling station.

D. Parents need to consider themselves as trainers for marriage, and the home have an intentional purpose of marriage training as an ongoing practice. This should include:

1. Biblical training on marriage and divorce.

2. Inclusion of children in home management, tasks and decision making.

3. Attention to male and female roles in marriage as demanded by the Bible and our culture.

4. Supervised group social enrichment for mixed sexes needs to be provided.

5. Thoughtful Bible-based sex education.

6. Help for progress toward independence and the acceptance of individual responsibility.

7. Education in the process and content of meaningful communication.

8. The development of individual potential, abilities and self—hood (music, art, athletic skills, languages).

9. Aid in developing the ability to delay and sometimes even deny gratification.

10. Help in finding joy and meaning in work and productive activity.

11. Leading in the development of a spiritual core based upon faith in Christ drawing on His strength.

VI. THE ROLE OF THE PRESENTLY MARRIED IN PREVENTING DIVORCE (THEIR OWN)

- A. Develop a realistic view of marriage — no marriage is without problems.
- B. Come to see marriage problems as growth opportunities.
- C. Develop a high commitment to the success of your marriage.
- D. Give first consideration to the quality of one's own input into the marriage. Try to do all things through love.
- E. Develop the concept of greatness through service as Christ has stressed and modeled.
- F. Accept your marriage partner as he/she is, even while working together for improvement and growth.
- G. Admit your own faults and be willing to change.
- H. Learn to accept correction and constructive criticism without becoming reactive and defensive.
- I. Reserve time for each other. Confirm your love for each other by things you do.
- J. Develop mutual interests that draw you together.
- K. Give attention to the fulfilling of each other's needs, including the sexual needs.
- L. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath. . .be angry and do not sin.
- M. Forgive each other even as you ask God to forgive you.
- N. Work at developing full and satisfying communication. Especially consider the Biblical injunction to be quick to listen and slow to speak or to be angry.
- O. Give attention to problems as they occur. . .do not ignore them. . .do not wait until they become giants. Seek help when and if necessary.
- P. Evangelists need to equip themselves to teach and preach often and well on this subject.

Q. Seminars and offerings involving "specialists" need to be made available on a recurrent basis.

R. Through your reading of appropriate literature and attendance at special programs continue to grow in your knowledge of and ability to fulfill your role in marriage.

S. Continue to develop yourself as a person spiritually, intellectually, socially, and physically.

T. Make your life together one of worship and of praise to God.

VII. THE ROLE OF THOSE CONTEMPLATING MARRIAGE IN PREVENTING DIVORCE (THEIR OWN)

A. Spend a lot of time in prayer asking guidance in mate selection.

B. Prepare yourself for marriage:

1. Spiritually, by growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.

2. Physically by remaining chaste and developing a healthy, vigorous body.

3. Socially by learning to communicate well and exercise the ability to concentrate on someone other than self.

4. Intellectually by developing your mind and abilities.

5. Emotionally by developing your ability to love someone other than yourself.

6. Role-wise by trying to learn all you can about your future role in marriage.

7. Psychologically by preparing for the demanding process of taking another person into your life.

8. Economically as indicated by developing independence and the ability to benefit from saleable skills/abilities.

C. Special attention needs to be given to mate selection. Areas to be considered are:

1. Special qualities.

2. Personality factors.

3. Family and social background.
4. Psychological health.
5. Attractiveness to you.
6. Community of interests.
7. Educational preparation.
8. Attitudes and ideals relating to marriage & parenthood.
9. Ability and willingness to communicate.
10. Attitudes toward money and material things.
11. Relationship to personal family.

D. When you think you may have found the right person:

1. Spend more time communicating and sharing interests than in petting and physical contact.
2. Take a good look at each other's family.
3. Test out each other's spiritual foundation.
4. Test out each other's commitment to marriage success.
5. Reach some agreement about future aspects of marriage including attitudes toward sex, relationship to in-laws, where you will live, the work you will pursue, concepts of role and role fulfillment & child-bearing/rearing.
6. Do a lot of Biblical and secular reading on marriage and the demands of marriage.
7. Interview persons you know to be successfully married and seek advice from them.
8. Shop around together and get some idea of the costs of marriage economically. Arrange a budget together.
9. Ask for psychological testing and pre-marriage counseling.

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