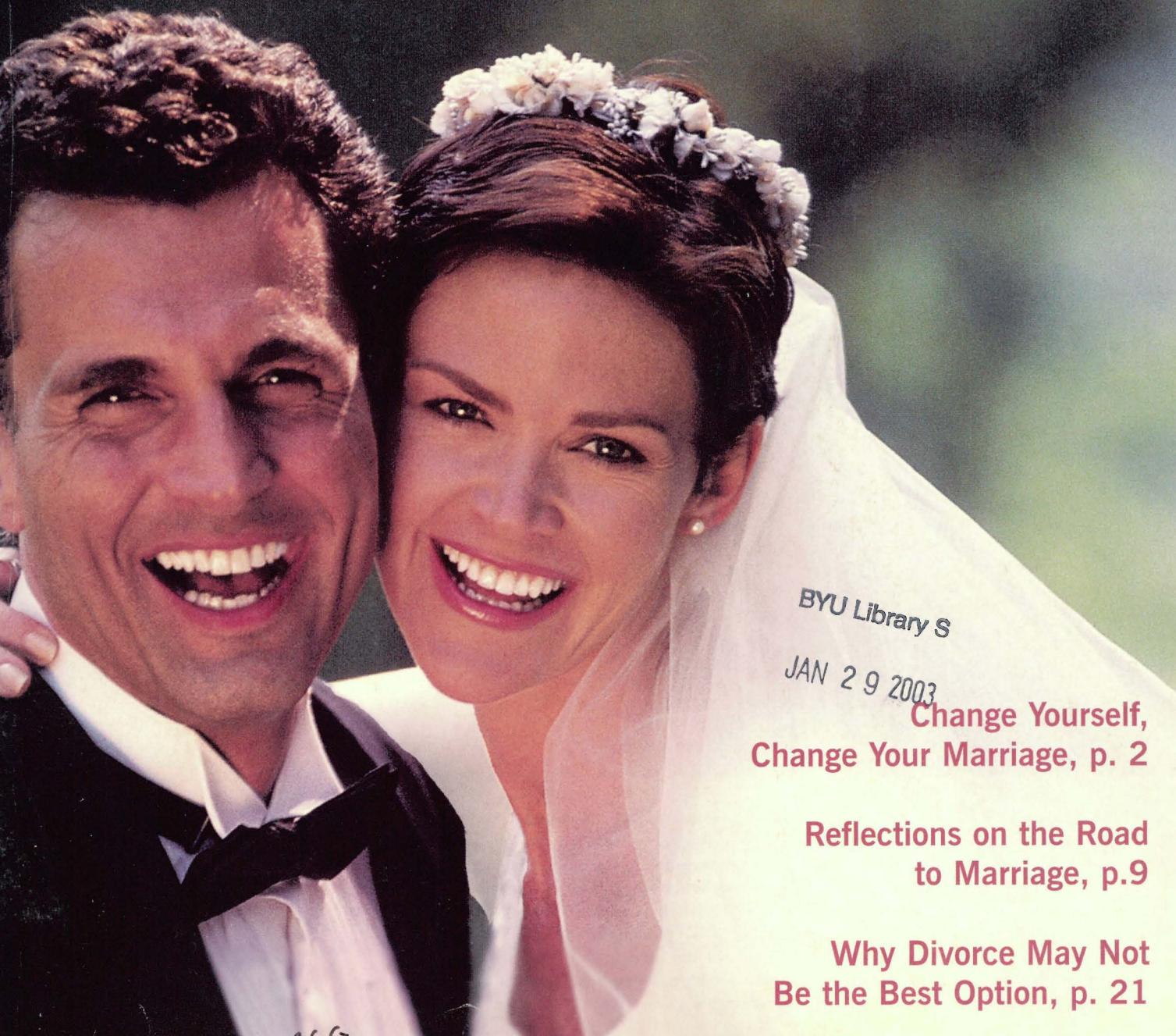


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**Change Yourself,
Change Your Marriage, p. 2**

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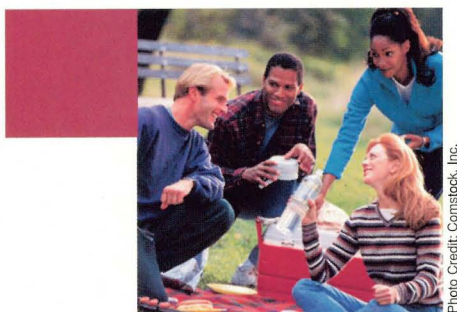


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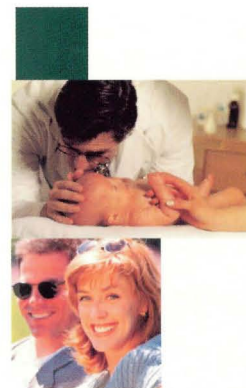


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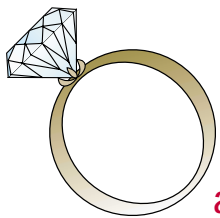
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CHANGE YOURSELF and Change Your Marriage

By Douglas A. Abbott, Ph.D



One of the unexpected—and earliest—realities of marriage is that your partner is imperfect. You discover that your partner has faults and annoying habits that you would like to change.¹ However, a characteristic of human nature is that it is difficult to change another person, even if such change would be in that person's best interest.²

When you become upset or disappointed with your imperfect partner, four things often happen:^{3, 4}

1. You blame your partner for your unhappiness. You judge your partner's behavior as wrong, unfair or unjust.
2. You fail to see your contribution to the problem. In many, but not all cases, your attitudes or behaviors have played some role in the occurrence and persistence of the problem.
3. You attempt to get your partner to change his or her behavior.
4. Your partner becomes defensive and resists change.

Consider this example. James and Robyn have been married eight years and have three children, ages two, four, and seven. James comes home and feels

overwhelmed by the apparent disorder and confusion. He thinks to himself, "What has Robyn been doing all day? I can't handle this mess everyday." James wants to eat and relax, and he blames his wife for not providing a calm and orderly home. He fails to understand that Robyn is worn out, and that he usually does little to help with the house work and kids. Without really seeing beyond his own view, James criticizes his wife, and Robyn feels accused of laziness and incompetence. She gets defensive and blames him for not helping her more.

In many conflict situations such as this, little is accomplished because the focus of change is on the spouse. The spouse, however, is not likely to alter his habits or personality

just because you want him to. No matter how hard you try to squeeze change out of your partner, he or she will change only when the person wants to change.⁵

But if you can't change your partner, how can you solve the relationship problem? One answer is this: you can effect some change in the relationship if you are willing to CHANGE YOURSELF! The focus of change becomes you, NOT YOUR PARTNER. Consider the words of Norma Tarazi, an authority on Muslim families:

In most cases [of interpersonal conflict], both people have made some mistakes in dealing with each other. But the other person's mistakes are not your concern. When you want to improve a relationship...you

*improve yourself and make your behavior the best possible. You cannot force another individual to change and be the way you want—that is up to him or her.... Correct your behavior so the responsibility for this [problem] becomes as little your fault as possible... hoping perhaps that the other person will change, but not demanding it as an outcome of your efforts.*⁶

Thus, one way to improve your marriage is to modify your attitudes and your actions.⁷ It is a process of turning your attention inward to see what you can do—not what your spouse should do!

The goal is to become a more loving person. The most cherished definition of love (at least in the Western world) is recorded by the Apostle Paul in the 13th chapter of Corinthians in the New Testament. “It is a Christian definition; but it is so universal that its almost exact equivalent is used by Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews.”⁸

Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil...beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Harry Stack Sullivan, a noted American psychiatrist, suggested that the state of love exists when the satisfaction and security of another person becomes as significant to one as one's own

satisfaction and security.⁹ M. Scott Peck asserts that love is less a feeling and more a commitment to the growth of another person.¹⁰ Now note: In all three of these definitions, love is an action undertaken to benefit another person. Thus one of the keys to improving an intimate relationship is to give more and demand less from the partner.¹¹ If you want to improve your marriage, you must be willing to improve yourself. To help you focus inward (at self) instead of outward (at your partner), I present three principles for your consideration.

Principle 1 **Change Your Behavior:** **Change First**

Dr. Brent Barlow, a professor of marriage and family at Brigham Young University, likened the parable of the mote and the beam, given by the Jewish rabbi Jesus, to marital conflict. The parable states that one should first examine one's own large faults (the beam, a large piece of wood) before you criticize the small faults (the mote, a small speck of sawdust) in your partner.¹² I have adapted Dr. Barlow's ideas and present three steps to the Change First principle.

1. Exercise patience with your partner's faults and annoying habits. Drop the insistence that he or she must change.

2. Take responsibility to change yourself and improve the relationship. The focus becomes you, not your partner. You change first.

3. Assuming there is good will and love between you and your

spouse, your partner may then desire to also change. As you act in loving, forgiving, and benevolent ways, your spouse may reciprocate. Tarazi explained that the other person might improve, perhaps in response to your improvement.¹³

Reflect on this example of the Change First principle. Beth and Andrew are newly married. Prior to the wedding Beth admired Andrew's carefree, spontaneous, free-spirited approach to living. Now that they are married and expecting a child, she wants her husband to settle down, and get serious with school and work. In gestures and words, Beth criticizes Andrew's lackadaisical lifestyle and wants him to change.

Over several months her anger grows and engenders cold, distant interaction. Eventually, she realizes that her husband is neither lazy nor irresponsible, and she stops the disparagement. She thinks to herself, “What can I do to be a better wife and partner; how can I support and encourage my husband?” Andrew feels the change immediately; her acceptance and positive attitude lifts his spirit and frees him to pursue his goals and dreams. Over the next year, Andrew is accepted into an architecture program and finds a good job as a draftsman.

To sum up the Change First principle: At times, instead of blaming the partner for your unhappiness, or focusing attention on the spouse's mistakes and imperfections, take the first step to improve things yourself. Decide what you can do and do it. If you are unhappy with the

In many conflict situations, little is accomplished because the focus of change is on the spouse. The spouse, however, is not likely to alter his habits or personality just because you want him to.

way your spouse treats you, then improve your care and treatment of your spouse. You take the first step—you show more love first!

Principle 2 **Change Your Attitude**

Several years ago I read a short story entitled, “80 percent I love you, 20 percent I hate you.”¹⁴ I’ve borrowed the idea and created my own version of the story:

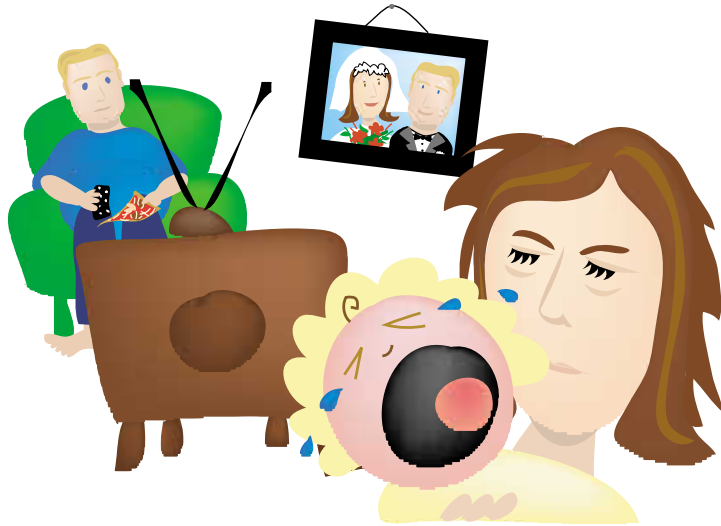
A middle-aged man named Steve is reflecting on his marriage of 15 years to his wife Susan. They have three school-aged children. Steve is dissatisfied with Susan, though he admits she has many good qualities; he likes 80 percent of Susan. She is (1) a good cook and homemaker, (2) she shares many of his leisure activities, (3) she manages money wisely, (4) she is helpful to Steve’s elderly parents, (5) she is a loving and affectionate sexual partner, (6) she is an excellent parent, (7) she is charitable and helps others, and (8) Susan is

usually pleasant, positive, and supportive in her attitude toward him. Yes, there is a lot (80 percent) to like about Susan, but Steve is dissatisfied. There is 20 percent of Susan he dislikes. He believes she doesn’t measure up to his ideal in two important ways. She (1) is overweight and doesn’t look or dress as attractively as she used to, and (2) she still doesn’t like to socialize and go out with his friends and co-workers for dinner, parties, and other activities. As the months pass, Steve continually thinks about the 20 percent that he dislikes and takes for granted the 80 percent that is good. At this time, he begins to notice that his new administrative assistant, Mary, is very nice looking and loves to socialize and party with clients and co-workers. One year later Steve divorces Susan and marries Mary. Two years later Steve is again contemplating his marriage, but this time he is analyzing his likes and dislikes with his new wife Mary. Yes, she is still winsome and attractive, and she loves to party with his friends and co-workers and she has other good qualities, but there are some problems. Mary is

a disinterested stepmother, she is critical of many of his personal habits, and she doesn’t like to cook so they must eat out most of the time.

One moral of this story is that no partner is perfect. No matter whom you marry, there will be some things you dislike about the person. You may have to learn to live with some of your spouse’s minor, irritating habits or behaviors without anger, without resentment.¹⁵ Toleration without rancor is the key to overlooking small faults. I am assuming, however, that these faults are not morally wrong or evil acts, such as abuse, dishonesty, or infidelity.

To avoid over-focusing on the spouse’s negatives, you can train your mind to focus on the positives.¹⁶ Overlook the few small things (the 20 percent) that you don’t like about your spouse and continually remind yourself of the 80 percent that you like. Make it a habit to thank your spouse for the things he or she does well. As you compliment and praise your spouse for strengths, you will be less likely to notice the partner’s weaknesses and faults.¹⁷





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To illustrate the “Change Your Attitude” principle, take the situation of Nancy and Nick. They have been married for 15 years. They have struggled at times with money issues and some differences on parenting, but overall they consider their marriage healthy and strong. Over the years, however, Nancy has noticed that Nick doesn't get around to fixing things around the house. Currently, the kitchen faucet leaks, the weeds in the garden are taller than the corn,

and the bedroom is always cold because the large window won't seal tight. She expects her husband to be more like her handyman father. Nancy also thinks that Nick spends too much time fishing and hunting with his brothers. Over several months her resentment begins to boil over. She thinks to herself, “How can I continue to live with this man who makes my life so miserable?” Nancy sees his behavior as intentional and blames him for her unhappiness. After some introspection and lots of prayers, Nancy begins to see that the real problem is with her attitude, not her husband's behaviors. She says to herself, “Ok, I wish he would learn to fix things, and yes, I'd like him home more on the weekends and not out chasing trout or pheasant, but it's not that bad. Look at all the good things he does. He's a good father; he treats me with kindness and respect; we are not rich but he provides a good living for us, and he's fun to be with.” Her thinking continues, “When I look at the big picture, he is really a great guy and I should consider myself lucky.” During the next few weeks, Nancy consciously attends to the good things about Nick and the bright side of the marriage. She fixes the faucet herself, and she and her friend weed the garden!

To review principle two, Change Your Attitude: be positive and optimistic about your spouse. Focus on the 80 percent you love. Remind yourself often of your partners' good qualities and virtues. Live peaceably with your partner's few minor imper-

fections, the 20 percent you don't like. Some things may change; accommodations can be negotiated, but don't expect perfection and realize some things may never suit you. Harold Kushner, a Jewish Rabbi, said it well:

The illusion of perfection in the partner will not last. And that is why the essence of marital love is not romance but forgiveness...Forgiveness as the truest form of love means accepting without bitterness the flaws and imperfection of our partner, and praying that our partner accepts our flaws as well...Mature marital love sees faults clearly and forgives them, understanding that there are no perfect people, and that an imperfect spouse is all that an imperfect person like us can aspire to...If we cannot love imperfect people, if we cannot forgive them for their exasperating faults, we will condemn ourselves to a life of loneliness, because imperfect people are the only kind we will ever find.¹⁸

Principle 3 **Change Your Heart**

Common approaches used to treat individual or family problems include: (1) education, to teach new skills; (2) therapy, to alter thinking or change behavior; and (3) medicine, to control impulses and/or enhance mood.¹⁹ Each method, alone or in combination, has value and can achieve good results, but is often ineffective.²⁰ These interventions may be unproductive because the person's heart is not changed. The heart, in this context, refers to

one's will, desire, or motivation to be kind, forgiving, patient, loving, gentle, and unselfish. For example, in therapy, you can teach a couple more effective communication skills, but unless the spouses are humble, patient, and forgiving (they experience a change of heart), then the new skills are not likely to be used or used properly.

Thus, there is a fourth approach to mental health often overlooked by secular social scientists—and that is divine intervention, or put more simply: getting help from God.²¹ Many family professionals prefer to ignore God and God's influence on human relationships because it is not readily observable or easily measured—it is not scientific. Many other

social scientists are agnostic or atheistic and hence have neither experience nor interest in religion.²² Some are simply hostile to religion because it has too often been associated with ignorance, superstition, inflexibility, and dogmatism. Allen E. Bergin, a nationally recognized psychologist, once mused, "Like the entomologist who found a bug he couldn't classify and therefore stepped on it, behavioral scientists have chosen to ignore the world of spiritual reality because their assumptions and methods would not allow it."²³ For most people, however, God is a reality, and many report they have felt God's influence in their lives.^{24, 25}

There are many ways that God could influence a marriage. First, a couple's common commitment to God may increase their loyalty and commitment to each other. Muhammad, the Muslim prophet, taught that half of one's religious duty is to love and serve his family. Thus, love of God requires love of spouse. The Qur'an, the holy book of the Muslims, speaks clearly to this issue:

And among the signs of God is this, that He created for you mates, that you might live in tranquility with them; and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. (Sura 30:21).

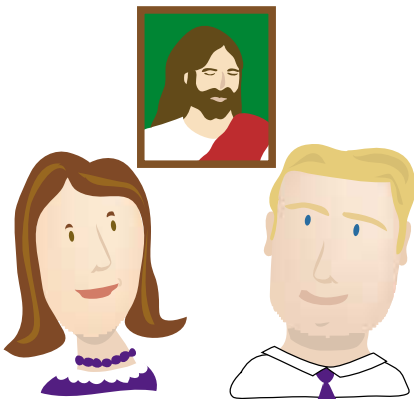
Second, the religious believer will avoid actions that could hurt and destroy the marriage—such as lying, abuse, or adultery. Many Christians and Jews believe that if you love God, you will obey God's commands. God

prohibits many hurtful behaviors and encourages spouses to respect, honor, and serve one another.

A third way that closeness to Deity may improve a marriage is by "softening" the hearts of the marital partners. As previously stated, a "change of heart" means that as one gets closer to God in true and meaningful worship, God's spirit or influence can transform one's will, temperament, attitudes, and desires. As the person moves nearer to God, he or she will become more forgiving, patient, kind, tolerant, and unselfish.

Hate and anger are incompatible with God; thus, as one develops a more meaningful relationship with Deity, the person must shed those attitudes or actions that are in opposition to God's nature and will. A poignant example of the change of heart phenomena is told in the Book of Mormon, one of the sacred scriptures of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A prophet named Benjamin is urging his people to believe in God, give up their sins, obey the commandments, and accept Christ as their savior. At the end of his sermon the people exclaim: "The Spirit of the Lord has wrought a mighty change in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:1). Thus, the anger, the contempt, or a disposition to hurt the spouse are all greatly lessened or eliminated by one's emotional/spiritual nearness to God. Or, put more simply, you cannot love God and hate your spouse; and converse-

There are many ways that God could influence a marriage. First, a couple's common commitment to God may increase their loyalty and commitment to each other.



ly, you are more likely to love your spouse if you love God (see the New Testament, First Epistle of John, chapter 4).

In order to further understand the Change of Heart principle, the reader is asked to consider several assumptions:

1. God exists and God can influence human nature and social relationships. God is the Lord of all humanity.

2. Humans have a self-centered nature. We tend to put our own needs, wants, and desires ahead of others, including family members.

3. Selfishness is at the heart of many marital and family problems.²⁶

4. A personal, meaningful relationship with God tends to reduce personal selfishness, which in turn improves interpersonal interaction.

Unselfish behavior can also be described as other-centered, prosocial, charitable, or altruistic. Altruism can be considered the opposite of selfishness; it is the selfless concern for others. An altruistic person is as concerned, or at times more concerned, with the happiness and welfare of the family unit, than with his own personal comforts, convenience, and preferences. Such a person gives up (or delays) his own immediate wants in favor of doing that which is best for other family members.²⁷ It does not mean that the person becomes a drudge to others, or that he neglects his own legitimate needs. An altruistic person shifts the balance away from “What is best for me,” to “What is best for my family?” If one

becomes more altruistic (i.e., less selfish), that person can negotiate family relationships more effectively and fairly. Relationships are often improved when one acts in more altruistic ways.²⁸

It appears that God’s spirit or influence can change one’s heart—a selfish, egotistical person can become less so with God’s help. Dr. Terry Warner has given a heartfelt example of this principle.²⁹

He relates the story of a woman whose husband was emotionally neglectful. The more she pushed him for intimacy, the more he withdrew from her. She believed her anger was caused by her husband’s lack of attention and affection. In her eyes, he was to blame for her emotional suffering. Though she exhibited the outward trappings of religion (i.e., she attended church, prayed and read scriptures), she finally realized she was not really close to God in her thoughts and the intents of her heart. She went through a spiritual awakening, a change of heart, and she stopped the blaming and criticism. She prayed more earnestly and attended more closely to God’s spiritual promptings. As she came to God “with full purpose of heart,” she in turn had a “change of heart” and showed more patience, kindness, and love to her husband. After two months she reported that her husband awoke one morning and said to her, “You know, we find fault too much with each other. I am never going to find fault with you again.” She concluded: “It was as if an icy glass

wall between us had melted away. Almost overnight our relationship became warm and sweet. Three years have passed, and still it [the marriage] continues warmer and happier.”

To recapitulate a Change of Heart: If you worship and serve God in true and healthy ways, you may become less selfish. The unselfish person is more likely to build happy and satisfying marital and family relationships. His thoughts and actions are more often directed to the welfare of family members rather than upon his own personal wants and desires.

In Conclusion

These three principles of change may be useful in your marriage, but they will not cure all problems and complaints. They may work best in marriages without severe conflict or other serious dysfunctions such as mental illness, addiction, abuse, or infidelity. For these more serious problems, family education, therapy, and/or medical treatment may be more effective.

As you consider the merit and usefulness of these ideas, remember that the focus of change is you, your attitudes, and your behaviors. Remember, however, I’m not suggesting that your partner never needs to change or that you must always be the one to give in, to sacrifice, or to take the first healing step. Of course the partner must, at times, change too. But the point is this: the usual way one tries to fix a marital problem is by trying to force the partner to change—and


this approach often fails. You cannot easily change your partner, but you can change yourself. Thus, one way to improve your marriage is to take personal responsibility and deliberate action to improve yourself.

You can do three things. You can change your behavior and try to improve your own conduct relative to a specific marital issue. Ask yourself, "What can I do to make this situation better?" Then do it without pressuring your partner to change.

You can change your attitude and focus on your partner's positive qualities and overlook his few irritating behaviors. Be content with all the good things your spouse is and does, and be less troubled by his faults or minor bad habits.

And last but not least, you can change your heart if you develop a more true and meaningful relationship to God. You may become less selfish as you draw nearer to God. Your altruistic actions will improve your marriage, and your spouse will respond favorably to your selfless service and support.

To conclude, if you want to change your marriage, first ask yourself, "Am I willing to change myself?" "Will I look inward for answers instead of outward for blame?" If you can answer, "Yes" to these questions, then try one of the three principles. Your relationships with your spouse (or even a child,

friend, or employer) may improve if you change yourself for the better. 

Douglas A. Abbott is a professor of Family Sciences at the University of Nebraska.

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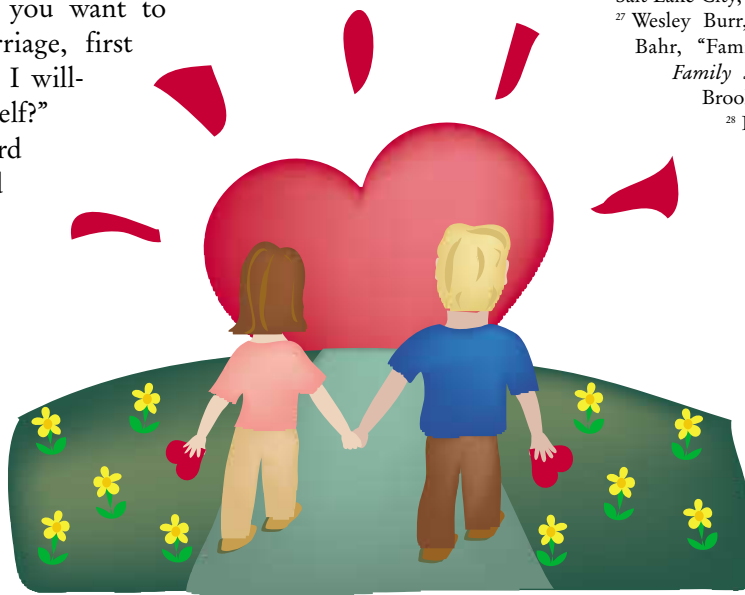
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Reflections on Traveling the Road to Marriage

By Robert H. Stahmann

Marriage is popular in the United States. Over 90 percent of those in this country will marry at some time in their life, even a higher percentage in some of the subgroups my colleagues and I have studied over many years. This is common knowledge. In this examination of the process of traveling the road to marriage, my hope is that you may evaluate your own experiences and your own expectations about marriage and the road to marriage, wherever you might be on that road.

Marriage is risky, though. Many couples divorce, and, depending on the group being studied, the divorce rate is 35-45 percent. Even so, most who divorce remarry, and do so within two or three years.

The results of marriage are positive for both spouses, includ-

ing benefits in both mental and physical health. There is also evidence indicating that in cities with a high marriage rate, there is significantly lower crime rate and less welfare dependency.

What is marriage?

We might ask, what is marriage? And we all have our own ideas. To some degree, it's a personal commitment where people trust each other, enjoy one another's company, and plan to be together for some time in that relationship. Marriage is certainly a personal bond that grows over time as a couple's relationship changes and grows. It's a sacred promise; in fact, for most people it is a religious ceremony performed in front of God, man, and witnesses. And many people take that to be a very serious part of their marriage relationship. Certainly,

it is a financial partnership. It is a sexual union; and for those who believe in chastity before marriage and monogamy and fidelity after marriage, it is the chief sexual outlet for couples. It's a family-making bond, not only in a legal sense, but in a psychological sense, and so a family is created with a marriage. And certainly a marriage is a legal contract where there are responsibilities as well as rights and privileges.

But beyond understanding the definitions of marriage, what do you know about your road to marriage? Is it a straight road, as my family would say, the kind of Wyoming road I love where you can look out and count antelope most anywhere you might be driving along that road? Or is it a beautiful springtime pastoral road that winds through the

countryside? And how is the ride, how was the ride, and how will the ride be?

A few years ago, my family and I were up in West Yellowstone, Montana, a city with lots of campers, and I happened to notice a camper with the sign on the back, “Just Married.” As I went up closer, I saw another sign in smaller lettering that said,

*They donned their best duds
and hoped for no hail.
They'll say their “I do’s”
and they're hitting the trail.
It took him some time,
though she never varied.
Having courted a decade,
they're finally just married.*

As I knelt down to take a picture of this sign, I saw the personalized license plate, “2 WLD 4 U,” and I wondered if this was his camper or hers? Did they change the license plate after the wedding took place? But the back of their camper gave some interesting insights into the road they were on.

Our Marital Script or Roadmap

Growing up, each one of us develops a script or ideas about who we are, which includes expectations about our lives and what marriage will be like. This script becomes the foundation for our marital roadmap, so to speak. During dating and courtship—with however many people you date and how many courtships you're in—the road to marriage is somewhat visible and

our journey is underway. During this time in our lives, a joint script, or a couple script, is also being written, consciously and unconsciously, as we date and court. This script is really the defining of our expectations, hopes, plans, and dreams for our marriage. The script is refined as we have real-life experiences during dating and courtship. By the time of the wedding ceremony, almost all of the dimensions of marriage are present in the relationship. Much of our joint marital script is in place and has been written, rehearsed, and rewritten time and time again. Our scripts are in fact the maps as we travel the road to marriage.

Our drive along the road to marriage begins with a couple's first meeting and first impressions. It's interesting to ask couples about that, and very often they don't even recall when they first met, let alone what their first impressions were. There are those who travel long distances before there is a mutual interest, and then, as the saying goes, there are those who “just know” this is the person they are going to marry. Here is one example:

He was the head counselor at the boys' camp, and I was the head counselor at the girls' camp, and they had a social one night, and he walked across the room. I thought he was coming to talk to my friend, Maxine, because people will always cross the room to talk to Maxine. He was coming to talk to me, and he said, “I'm Ben Small of the Coney Island Smalls.” At that

moment I knew. I knew the way you know about a good melon.

Another part of the drive includes others' impressions, as friends and family respond to who you are and how you are with this person. One of the things you can count on in a college culture such as BYU is that, after a date, there will be a real processing of this guy by her roommates, and the reactions of others become part of our script.

The relationship continues and becomes exclusive, as well as inclusive as a couple does things with other people. Steady dating emerges, and personal bonding develops. At the same time, the couple is developing trust, the ability to confide in one another, and the confidence to share secrets and expectations. Then there is the formal engagement, which is a wonderful time, and the planning of the wedding. There are those who, once they're engaged, want to hurry up and get to the wedding. On the other hand, we find that many couples who, after the wedding, say they wish that they had had a longer engagement to really get to know one another and benefit from that experience. And the drive goes on.

Once the wedding day has



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come and gone, the road of marriage can be smooth or bumpy just as it was before the wedding. It may have pot-holes and ruts, as personality issues come up. There will be compatibilities and incompatibilities, similarities and differences, some of which matter and some of which don't matter at all. Communication, of course, is usually pretty good for most couples before they marry, or they wouldn't have become engaged in the first place. Hopefully, married couples will talk to each other as they experience differences and will learn to deal with those. And conflicts arise not only over negative things, but over positive things as well. It may be an invitation to a relative's house for Sunday dinner. Or what to do over the holidays, or which leisure activities to engage in, individually or as a couple. Planning how two people can really live as cheaply as one is something most couples talk about while they're engaged, but most don't discover until after the wedding that you can't live on love alone.

Understanding and handling affection, being affectionate, and considering how affection was handled and displayed in families of origin are also issues people work on as they're on the road to marriage. Couples learn that they haven't just married an individual, they have married into an entire family; and they form relationships with parents and with siblings, with whom they likely will interact more in years to come.



Fun and humor are bonding aspects of the relationship that are introduced early. Usually the couple has had some fun together before their wedding, but now must develop their sense of humor within their marriage. In many marriages, religious issues, including fundamental beliefs, practices, and forms of worship, have an effect on molding behaviors.

Couples must also clarify roles and expectations as they write their joint marital script. As a matter of fact, clarifying role expectations is a lifelong task. Numerous studies point out the advantage of flexibility or adaptability—not being wishy-washy by any means, but being able to roll with the punches and changing our patterns when the terrain changes. Marriages need good shock absorbers, the same as good cars.

Psychological Marriage

Ask an engaged couple “When are you getting married?” and

they will give you a calendar date of the upcoming wedding. Ask a married couple, “When were you married?” and they (unless memory fails) will tell you something like June 14th or December 21st. Isn't it interesting that in our everyday language we consider the wedding date to be the beginning of our marriage? What we mean to say when we asked “When were you married?” is “When was your wedding?”

The wedding is the legal ceremony that celebrates and sanctions the marriage. The wedding is an event. The marriage license is evidence of this event. However, marriage is not an event. Marriage is a wonderfully complex, multidimensional process. Marriage is a relationship that is formed and functions in multiple dimensions and on many levels over time.

To say then that marriage begins with the wedding is inaccurate. It is more helpful to view the marriage as having begun before the wedding. The wedding announces that which has already begun on a more private and subtle plane during dating, courtship, and engagement. And so psychological marriage, if you will, precedes legal marriage—that is, the wedding—and continues long after the wedding, with an obviously wide range of successes and failures.

For those of you who are married, that is those who have had a wedding, it can be a fun and useful exercise to ask yourself and your spouse not only when was your wedding,

but also how has your marriage developed psychologically? And, what are the dimensions of your marriage now, and what were they during the early years? How has your marriage changed? What was the terrain of the road? How have you handled the journey? Can you modify the marriage vehicle and road map a bit so that things will be even better?

In my work with the Marital Preparation Research Project at BYU, my colleagues and I have observed that there are two primary ways means through which we all seem to learn much of what we know about marriage. The first involves the learning of precepts about marriage. We learn these precepts directly through conversations, classes, life experiences, and the like from parents, church leaders, teachers, life experiences, counselors, and others. The second comes from patterning

what we see in the examples of marriage that surround us. This patterning is usually subtle, coming from our conscious and unconscious observations of what to do in marriage, as well as what not to do when we marry. The process of precept guided patterning occurs throughout our premarital, and even marital, years.

Preparation for Marriage

In recent years, many churches, organizations, and government entities have offered an increasing number of premarital counseling services for couples who are approaching their wedding day. The good news is, prevention of marital problems is possible and realistic, and the risk factors for divorce can be reduced. Those preparing to marry or remarry are generally open to strengthening their relationships. National studies are showing that the majority of people, if they had known of premarital counseling and educational programs and resources, would have participated. This is not an assumption that people should participate in premarital counseling or education because they're skill-deficit; in fact, most people have good

skills. But everyone's skills can be enhanced.

So how else can couples prepare themselves to travel down the road of marriage? While research indicates that there are many different issues couples face in their marriages, one at the top of almost all lists is enhanced communication skills, coupled with problem solving skills. Be clear about and work to clarify expectations. What are the expectations about being a husband or a wife, and what are your expectations about your spouse's role as a wife or husband?

Our research has shown that counselors have identified the top five most frequent problems facing first marriages as being 1-unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse; 2-communication; 3-money management and finances; 4- decision making; 5-power struggles. Notice that four of these most frequent problems can be reduced or overcome by skill enhancement. The other problem, that of unrealistic expectations, can be overcome by knowing each other well and clarifying expectations before the wedding. That is to say, through clarification and the application of good communication skills.

So, develop means of handling finances, and discuss finances before and after the wedding. Deal with frustrations as they arise rather than burying them or having them build up and become resentments that can serve as a wedge in the relationship. Realize that you marry a family, not just an indi-



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vidual. In fact, as far as family members go, you will likely have more interaction over the years with brothers and sisters-in-law, than with your spouse's parents.

Develop a shared spiritual core for your relationship. In the field of marriage and family therapy nationally, we're finding that while spirituality used to be something that wasn't talked about by counselors, now the climate is such that many counselors encourage couples to discuss spirituality, religious values and behaviors. Obtain information about sexuality before the wedding. Talk about your expectations in regard to the children that you may have. If you perceive more severe problems, seek professional counseling before the wedding.

Some states have legislated incentives for premarital education and counseling. For example, a reduction in the marriage license fee if the couple participated in premarital education or counseling. A number of years ago, a law was introduced in the Utah state legislature to implement some form of premarital education program throughout the state. During the debates that followed, a political cartoon appeared in the Salt Lake Tribune that distills some of the issues that swirl around this topic. (The bill ultimately failed to pass in the state senate.)


The debate over whether governments or churches should require such courses and programs will continue, but in the meantime, there are excellent marriage preparation resources available for those who would

seek them. Often colleges and universities offer courses on preparing for marriage. There are many excellent books and articles. Browse through your library or bookstore. A new website that has excellent links to other websites dealing with marriage and preparation for marriages is www.foreverfamilies.net. There are premarital groups offered by professional counselors, which are not therapy groups but are educational groups. The online premarital site, RELATE, which stands for Relationship Evaluation, provides a 271-item inventory that couples can take online. They then receive a 19-page report that is designed to be self-interpretive (visit www.relate.byu.edu; there is a \$10 fee).

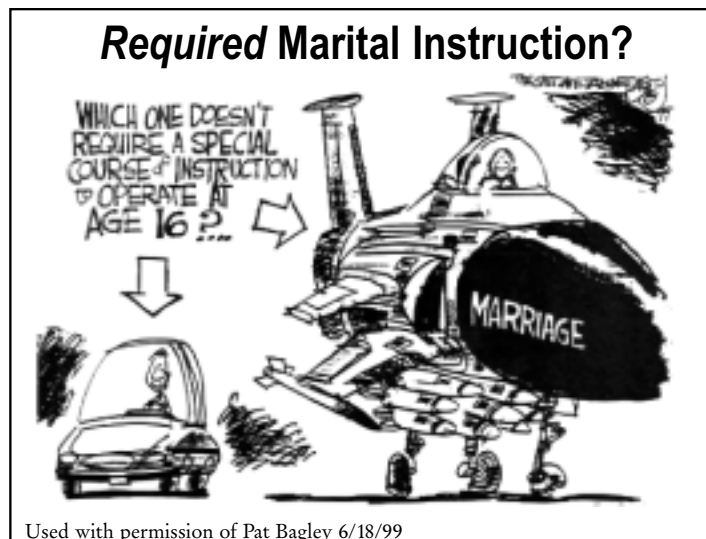
More and more there are opportunities for those who value marriage to be involved in various ways. Almost 200 communities across the country have established community marriage policies advocating and providing premarital education as a means of increasing the

mental and physical health for their citizens.

Mentor couples are involved, meeting with premarital and newlywed couples in discussions about marriage. Another website that can give you an idea of the many ways people can prepare for and enhance marriage is www.smartmarriages.com.

Now each couple, or each of you individually, has your story about the road to marriage or your hope for driving along that road. Get the best vehicle you can, with the accessories that you feel are important. Then read the map and enjoy the journey! 

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He's Having a Baby

THE PATERNAL CHILDBIRTH EXPERIENCE

By Lynn Clark Callister, RN, PhD, Geraldine Matsumura, RN, PhD,
and Katri Vehviläinen-Julkunen, CNM, PhD

A 32-year-old attorney—who was an only child himself—spoke of the profoundness of watching his wife give birth to their third child and third son: “I marvel at how she can endure that pain and not even complain. I can’t believe she would be willing to go through so much to have my sons. I have cut all three of my son’s [umbilical] cords. It helps me to feel involved, to have a symbolic role in the birth.” Becoming a father can be one of the most significant events in a life of a man. For many fathers, the birth of a child can be a significant emotional experience filled with mixed feelings such as excitement, fear, and gratification. This event represents the accomplishment of a significant life task as a man assumes a new

role, with new behaviors, and the development of a repertoire of new skills as a father.

In recent years the paternal role during pregnancy and childbirth has been receiving increasing attention by researchers. Despite a growing body of literature on the topic, the role of the father in childbirth, the quality of the paternal childbirth experience, and the benefits of a shared birth experience are only now recognized as valid and still need further definition.



THE PATERNAL EXPERIENCE AND ROLES DURING PREGNANCY

Paternal developmental processes occurring during pregnancy are as complex as maternal developmental processes. The father may experience mixed feelings, ranging from ambivalence and

anxiety to excitement and anticipation. Emotional responses depend on such factors as whether the pregnancy is planned or unplanned, the quality of the partner relationship, previous experiences with childbearing and childrearing, paternal and maternal age, educational level, socioeconomic status, and cultural and ethnic variables. Upon learning his wife was pregnant, one expectant father said, “I experienced all kinds of feeling through sheer joy and excitement to terror.” A first-time mother explained, “the ultrasound made it very real for my husband. He hadn’t felt the baby kick, so at 22 weeks when I had the ultrasound he said, ‘All right! We’re going to have a baby!’” Another expectant father said, “The pregnancy became real when the belly got big.”

Some of the identified fears of expectant fathers include performance, security, relationship,

and existential fears. A father of twins expressed his uncertainty, "It's a lot like walking into a pitch black room and suddenly thinking that there may not be a floor"¹

In studies of family dynamics during pregnancy, expectant mothers and fathers viewed each other as an important source of support in making the pivotal life transition to parenthood.² Recent work documents the profound grief reported by expectant fathers who experience the loss of an expected child.³ A father whose pre-term twin daughters lived a few short hours said, "I never could have imagined the grief and pain I felt as I held those precious little ones who were here in mortality such a brief time. Becoming a father and losing my daughters all at once was an overwhelming and bittersweet experience."

Phases of paternal involvement during pregnancy include the announcement or confirming phase in the first trimester (producing joy or conflict); the moratorium phase in the second trimester, which involves adjustment to the reality of the pregnancy; and the focusing phase in the third trimester, as a man redefines himself in terms of

becoming a father.⁴ One husband suggested that he felt more involved and excited when the couple was enrolled in childbirth education classes. His wife reported, "He's really into it!" Another expectant mother said that her husband called their unborn child, "The angel baby."

The expectant father may experience a variety of stressors, including fears about his role during childbirth and his relationship with the newborn. Barriers to the assumption of the paternal role in 84 first-time fathers included a troubled relationship with his father, a dysfunctional couple relationship, and other socio-cultural barriers.⁵ Styles of paternal involvement during pregnancy include observer, in which the father is passive and detached; expressive, in which the expectant father attempts to experience the pregnancy as much as possible; and instrumental, in which the father is the caretaker. One father's expressive style is suggested in these words,

My earliest memories with Trina started the day she was born. No, they started before that. They started in the womb. I would come home and I

would say, 'Hello,' and she would flick and flutter in the womb. She'd start kicking. If I put my hand on my wife's tummy when she was carrying Trina, she'd move over to where my hand was. If I put it on the other side, she'd move to that side. I used to sing to her. It's always been that way and has just continued pretty much that way. I remember one night laying with my head on my wife's stomach and singing a lullaby or something, I can't remember exactly which song. She was very active but she settled down, and then I put my hand on her stomach and she moved my hand.⁶



THE PATERNAL EXPERIENCE AND ROLES DURING LABOR AND BIRTH

The father may have multiple motives for being present at the birth of his child. Pressure from extended family, peers, the expectant mother, and health care providers can all influence the decision to be present during the birth of a child. He may also be motivated by a sense of responsibility to his unborn

For many fathers, the birth of a child can be a significant emotional experience filled with mixed feelings such as excitement, fear, and gratification. This event represents the accomplishment of a significant life task as a man assumes a new role, with new behaviors, and the development of a repertoire of new skills as a father.



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child and the child's mother. He may also have a desire for self-fulfillment through active participation in the birth.⁷ Regardless of his motivation, the father may assume a variety of roles during labor and birth, depending on such factors as his personal characteristics, coping strategies, the perceived expectations of others, professional support, the use of medical technology, and whether or not the laboring mother has epidural analgesia/anesthesia.⁸

Paternal roles during labor and birth may include (1) coaching, leading, or directing their partners through the childbirth experience; (2) acting as a teammate, assisting their partners by following the directions of others; (3) choosing to be a witness, observing the labor process and the birth of their child. Coaches seem to have a need for controlling themselves and the birth experience. Some wives suggest that the assumption of the coaching role by the father was essential to their own sense of control in a time of potential vulnerability. Teammates were there for their presence, providing physical and emotional support as part of a team with the health care providers being in control. Witnesses viewed themselves as observers of the birth, offering presence but not advocacy as a comfort to the laboring woman. Some seemed detached, but perhaps they were coping by appearing to focus on reading or watching television.

Interactive styles between laboring couples include:

1. The touch or *physical interactive style*, which includes conversation, touching, offering comfort, and modeling breathing and relaxation techniques.
2. The equipment or *interaction through instrumentation style*, which includes attention to electronic fetal monitoring and other medical technology.
3. The *non-interactive presence*, in which the father is present but does not evidence interaction with the laboring woman.⁹

Suggestions are provided by the National Center for Fathering for the expectant father who elects to serve as labor coach.¹⁰ Such suggestions include committing to regular practice; offering ice chips, back-rubs, and encouragement; acting as her advocate; complying with her requests; hugging her a lot and holding her hand. Much of the research focuses on the father's role as a labor coach, rather than exploring the personal needs of fathers whose wives are giving birth.

Whatever paternal role is assumed is less important than agreement between partners on what role is most appropriate and helpful.¹¹ This includes following proscribed sociocultural roles, such as those appropriate for Orthodox Jewish couples. In such cases, fathers do not physically support their wives because of religious prohibitions regarding touching or observing the woman when there is vaginal bleeding or when she is immodestly exposed. In spite of not following what would be considered typical coaching roles,



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THE FATHER MAY HAVE MULTIPLE MOTIVES FOR BEING PRESENT AT THE BIRTH OF HIS CHILD. PRESSURE FROM EXTENDED FAMILY, PEERS, THE EXPECTANT MOTHER, AND HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS CAN ALL INFLUENCE THE DECISION TO BE PRESENT. HE MAY ALSO BE MOTIVATED BY A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TO HIS UNBORN CHILD AND THE CHILD'S MOTHER. HE MAY ALSO HAVE A DESIRE FOR SELF-FULFILLMENT THROUGH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE BIRTH.

Orthodox Jewish women have expressed a strong sense of support as the expectant father prayed, read Psalms, and consulted the rabbi. One mother described it in this way, "I give birth and my husband helps me spiritually. He can pray for me; and that is my biggest support."¹²

Perceptions of new fathers about being present at the birth of their baby include feeling unprepared for an unpredictable process, for the intensity of the woman's pain experience and behavior, and for their own emotional responses.¹³ Emergent themes in first time fathers following the birth include:

1) it's happening; it's beginning (often expressed at the onset of labor); 2) more work than anticipated (often expressed during active labor as the intensity of the experience increases); 3) increased fear and hidden fears and emotions (often expressed during second stage labor); 4) lack of inclusion and increased excitement (often expressed as birth approaches); 5) relief and "we made it" (expressed at the time of birth); 6) time to get acquainted (expressed following birth).¹⁴

Some fathers are also unprepared for the initial sight of the newborn whose color may be purplish blue before the first breath is taken, with a misshapen head covered with vernix.

A 30-year-old, first-time father described his feelings when he first held his child, "It was hard to believe we had a son, that we were co-creators of this child with our Heavenly Father. I feel joy and happiness that I had never felt before. It is awe-inspiring, and I feel a strong sense of responsibility, a lot less self-centered and selfish, and more centered around this little spirit."

Laboring for relevance was the overall theme identified in a yearlong study of new fathers.¹⁵

Processes identified included grappling with the reality of pregnancy and the child, struggling for recognition as a parent, and plugging away at the role-making of involved fatherhood. Reality boosters identified included active participation during pregnancy and birth, and infant care giving in the early days and weeks of their infant's life.



POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF A SHARED BIRTH EXPERIENCE

At least two decades of research document that paternal involvement during childbirth may serve to facilitate the childbirth process emotionally and physically, enhance both maternal and paternal feelings of self worth, strengthen the couple relationship, and facilitate paternal-infant attachment.¹⁶ As expressed by one first-time mother, "I felt a very strong closeness to my husband because I feel the baby is a part of him and a part of me. Especially that he looks so much like [his father]. I can't even explain it. It's like someone took a string and tied both of us together. I felt like a unit—a little family."¹⁷

The father who is present during labor and birth and is actively involved in physical and emotional care giving activities offers a quality of care that is different than that of professionals.¹⁸ The father brings to the childbirth experience his presence, knowledge, and understanding of the laboring woman;

love for the mother and his child; and a sense of advocacy coupled with a desire for the woman to have a positive birth experience. One woman spoke of the importance of her husband's presence: "My husband was a real support from the start till the end. Just being supportive and being a comfort, that's the best I could have asked for. You see another part of your husband that you didn't know existed before, a caring part."¹⁹

When women were asked about who was most helpful to them while giving birth, the majority indicated that it was their partner, coupled with professional support.²⁰ Mothers described the birth experience as enjoyable when the father actively participated with them in an intimate and pivotal family experience.

The mutual benefits for both the childbearing woman and the father of her baby are illustrated in Figure 1. As the couple shares the experience of childbirth, the woman has the sense of that "someone cares," which contributes to a feeling of well-being. The father has a sense of competency and contributing to the experience as he offers support and presence. The maternal and paternal roles are shared and attained, the birth experience is integrated into the framework of the marriage. All of these circumstances contribute to a strengthened and enhanced couple relationship.

One father spoke about the enhancement of his love for his wife as they became parents for the first time, "I couldn't believe

Jeni's strength in giving birth. I was so proud of her. She was beautiful when I first met her.... She was beautiful the day we were married. But she was the most beautiful when she was breastfeeding my son wearing a gray flannel shirt and no make-up."

As the father progresses with the childbearing woman through pregnancy and birth, he begins to take on the paternal role. One father described his this way:

The moment that I really knew that I was a dad was the day after he was born. In the morning, Jeni went to take a shower and Joshua started getting a little fussy. So the nurse showed me how I could use my pinky finger as pacifier. So I cleaned my hands, and I sat down. And I put my little pinky in his mouth, and he started sucking on it, and then he looked right

into my eyes. And so, I guess this was my moment of fatherhood. And I knew that Josh was truly my son and I was his dad.

Fathers may also have a profound emotional and spiritual experience at birth. One father expressed with tears in his eyes what becoming a father meant: "It was as though a door opened to a room in my mind, in my heart, that I never knew existed, and I felt emotions of such sweetness and strength that I was overwhelmed. I have been ecstatic, absolutely joy-filled, since the moment I laid my eyes on that little baby."²¹ Another father spoke of his feelings of pride and the desire to be the protector:

It's hard to believe that you can have so much love for this itty-bitty thing. But I really love this little baby. The sense of responsibility is overwhelming. Now what I do affects this little guy. I

want to be the best father I can be.

In the work of the authors, when new mothers were interviewed about the meaning of their birth experience, fathers who were present were also eager to talk about birth from their perspective. Fathers do appreciate being asked about their birth experience.²² Another father said:

*Man, she was brave! I never knew how strong my wife is, you know? I just always thought of her as being delicate and beautiful, and man, she was so strong, and so beautiful, it made me dizzy to watch her. I loved being a part of it! What a high!*²³

Both professional and lay literature demonstrates an increasing focus on perceptions of the paternal birth experience²⁴ and

CHILDBEARING FAMILY

Partner

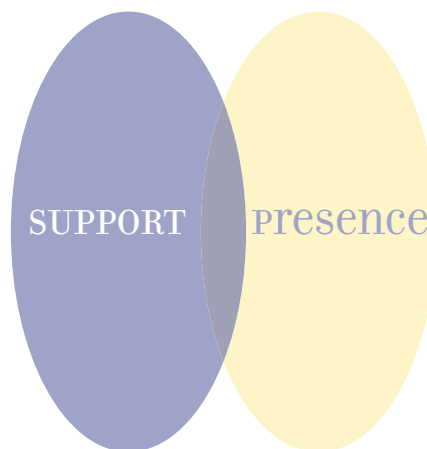
SATISFACTION
sense of competency

INTEGRAL ROLE

INTEGRATION OF
BIRTH EXPERIENCE

PATERNAL ROLE
ATTAINMENT

SHARED EXPERIENCE OF CHILDBIRTH



STRENGTHENED COUPLE RELATIONSHIP

CHILDBEARING woman

"someone cares"
FEELING OF WELL BEING

SHARED ROLE

INTEGRATION OF
BIRTH EXPERIENCE


MATERNAL ROLE
ATTAINMENT

ways to enhance the quality of paternal birth experiences.²⁵ Childbirth education classes should foster dialogue between partners about what childbirth and parenting roles they are mutually comfortable with. The expectant couple can explore how to make the childbirth experience and parenting the child theirs instead of hers alone. It has been suggested that expectant parents should actively negotiate sharing childcare and household labor responsibilities prior to the birth of their child. Incorporation of family life education into current childbirth education courses may be an effective intervention to enrich the family perspective. Such work is currently in process through the implementation of "Marriage Moments" as part of childbirth education classes in Utah Valley.²⁶

Facilitating assumption of the paternal role is helpful. One father wrote of his initial experiences with his child:

Seeing him [my son Scott], I took his hand in mine and was able to accompany him into the nursery. Later, I awoke to a nurse smiling as she stood above my chair. It had been six hours since I had taken him into the nursery, and I was still holding his hand.

While each father's experience will vary somewhat, the opportunity to participate in the birth of his child—and to then share his perspectives of his experiences during pregnancy, childbirth, and the transition to

fatherhood—will help a man integrate these experiences into the framework of his life. In addition, efforts to understand the father's role in childbirth, those factors that affect the quality of the father's experience, and the benefits of a shared birth experience will undoubtedly foster positive outcomes for the childbearing family. 

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IT WAS AS THOUGH A DOOR
OPENED TO A ROOM IN
MY MIND, IN MY HEART,
THAT I NEVER KNEW EXISTED,
AND I FELT EMOTIONS OF SUCH
SWEETNESS AND STRENGTH
THAT I WAS OVERWHELMED.
I HAVE BEEN ECSTATIC,
ABSOLUTELY JOY-FILLED,
SINCE THE MOMENT I LAID
MY EYES ON THAT LITTLE BABY.



Why Divorce is Often Not the Best Option: Rationale, Resources, and References

By Brent A. Barlow, Ph.D.



THE CROSSROADS

Not long ago I was talking to a friend who asked if I could help in some way with a difficult situation that had arisen in her family. Her daughter and son-in-law of several years were contemplating a divorce. They had two children. She said the young couple wasn't sure at the time, however, if they should divorce or stay together. They were looking at both options and were, therefore, at the crossroads of marriage. I told my friend I would send her some materials

and references that might assist her daughter and son-in-law with this critical decision. Since that time, I have had numerous similar requests from married couples, their friends or family members, as well as from several young adults who were seriously contemplating marriage even as their parents were considering divorce.

The decision to divorce or remain together to work things out is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. It is crucial for those considering divorce to anticipate what lies ahead in order to make informed decisions. Too often the fallout

from divorce is far more devastating than many people realize when contemplating the move.¹



LARGE NUMBERS AT THE CROSSROADS

A large number of married couples in the United States apparently approach the crossroads. Approximately 40-50 percent of couples in first marriages arrive at this point and eventually choose the path of divorce. The divorce rate for couples in second marriages is between 50-60 percent. Many other couples apparently

reach the crossroads but decide, for various reasons, to stay married. A Gallup Poll conducted in the United States found that 40 percent of married individuals had considered leaving their partners, and 20 percent said they were dissatisfied with their marriage about half the time.² Stated another way, nearly half the couples in the United States currently divorce, and another 20 percent have seriously considered it.

Many newlyweds reach the crossroads of marriage during the first or second year of marriage: Even newlyweds face serious problems during the first year of marriage. A study of several hundred newlywed couples found that 63 percent had serious problems related to their finances, 51 percent had serious doubts about their marriage lasting, 49 percent had significant marital problems, 45 percent were not satisfied with their sexual relationship, 41 percent found marriage harder than they had expected, and 35 percent stated their partner was often critical of them.³



SOME DIVORCES ARE WARRANTED

While advocating marriage, we must be sensitive to those who have chosen to terminate their marriage. There could be legitimate reasons or grounds for divorce. An estimated 30 percent of the divorces in the U.S. involve marital relationships with a high degree of conflict.⁴ Sometimes violence, physical and mental abuse, and/or threat of life to spouse and children are also present in these

highly conflicted relationships. In these situations divorce is most often in the best interest of those involved. Chronic addiction or substance abuse, psychosis or extreme mental illness, and physical or mental abuse are also reasons to divorce.⁵

Couples who divorce, particularly for the reasons noted, often need the help and support of family, friends, neighbors, religious leaders, and others in their respective communities. This is particularly so where children are involved. The adjustment to divorce is often difficult and apparently lasts for a considerable period of time. Legal assistance is needed, and sometimes couples may need counseling or therapy before, during, and after the separation for themselves and their children, if they have them. Competent counselors and therapists are available to assist in this transition.



POINTS TO PONDER

If you are at the marriage crossroads and trying to decide whether to divorce or stay married—or if someone you know is—carefully consider the following thirteen items before you make your “informed decision”:

1. THE OTHER 70 PERCENT OF DIVORCES

When we note that 30 percent of divorces involve couples in highly conflicted marriages, a question arises about the other 70 percent: Should they divorce or stay married? There are, perhaps, strong reasons for separating in

some of these relationships as well.

One study reported that the major reasons marriages fail are (in rank order) (1) infidelity, (2) no longer in love, (3) emotional problems, (4) financial problems, (5) sexual problems, (6) problems with in-laws, (7) neglect of children, (8) physical abuse, (9) alcohol, (10) job conflicts (11) communication problems, and (12) married too young.⁶

Interestingly, physical abuse was ranked as number eight in reasons for divorce, and “no longer in love” ranked as the number two reason for divorce. Many marriages seem to end from burnout rather than blowout. A significant number of these couples could work through their problems, revive their love, and stay married if they desired and worked at it. Only the husband and wife involved in a particular marriage, however, can make that decision as they are the ones who must ultimately abide by the consequences of their choices.

It is becoming increasingly evident, however, to those who study marriage trends in the United States, that a large number of divorces could, and perhaps should, be avoided in the best interests of those involved.

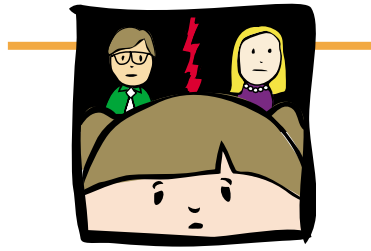
It is finally time to renounce—openly and clearly—the self-serving platitudes about independence and fulfillment and look at the reality of divorce. We act too frequently as if every infirm marriage deserves to die, based simply upon the emotional report of one distressed partner. Rather than viewing a separation first with alarm, we’re full of

sympathy for a divorcing friend, and we offer understanding of the temporary insanity involved in severing old ties.... If you hear someone for whom you have any feeling at all hinting at separation, instead of tacitly endorsing the move, instantly protest. Nearly every marriage has something worth preserving, something that can be restored. Revitalizing a relationship brings triumph and ongoing reward.... Avoiding divorce spares those concerned from the greatest trauma of their lives.⁷

2. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A STABLE MARRIAGE?

Several researchers and authors have reported the importance of a stable marriage for adults:

As the researchers have gone to press with their work and produced an enormous literature, one of the most consistent findings is that men and women do markedly better in all measures of specific and general well-being when they are married, compared to any of their unmarried counterparts. Married couples are healthier—physically and mentally—and they live longer, enjoy a more fulfilled life, and take better care of themselves (and each other). This has been shown consistently over decades, but it is rarely mentioned in the popular debate on the family. One of social science's best-kept secrets is that marriage is much more than a



HALF OF THE CHILDREN BORN THIS YEAR TO PARENTS WHO ARE MARRIED WILL SEE THEIR PARENTS DIVORCE BEFORE THEY TURN 18.

legal agreement between two people. Marriage truly makes a difference in the lives of men and women.⁸

3. WHAT CAN BE THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN?

It is obvious that a large number of children of divorced parents survive the experience and later become capable and stable adults.⁹ But it is also becoming increasingly evident that many children of divorce are at risk for developing detrimental behaviors, personality disorders, and disruptive lifestyles. Some of the variables in adjustment of children to parental divorce are (1) age of child at divorce, (2) amount of conflict in the marriage, (3) access to both parents after the divorce, (4) adjustment to a step-parent, if there is one, and (5) access to other nurturing adults during the childhood years.

Each year, over 1 million American children suffer the

divorce of their parents; moreover, half of the children born this year to parents who are married will see their parents divorce before they turn 18. Mounting evidence in social science journals demonstrates that the devastating physical, emotional, and financial effects that divorce is having on these children will last well into adulthood and affect future generations. Among these broad and damaging effects are the following:

- *Children whose parents have divorced are increasingly the victims of abuse. They exhibit more health, behavioral, and emotional problems, are involved more frequently in crime and drug abuse, and have higher rates of suicide.*

- *Children of divorced parents perform more poorly in reading, spelling, and math. They are also more likely to repeat a grade and to have higher dropout rates and lower rates of college graduation.*

- *Families with children that were not poor before the divorce see their income drop as much as 50 percent. Almost 50 percent of the parents with children that are going through a divorce move into poverty after the divorce.*

- *Religious worship, which has been linked to better health, longer marriages, and better family life, drops after the parents' divorce.¹⁰*

The divorce of parents, even if it is amicable, tears apart the fundamental unit of American society.¹¹

There are two other similar myths about divorce:

Two faulty beliefs provide the foundation for our current attitudes towards divorce. The first holds that if the parents are happier the children will be happier, too.... Children are not considered separately from their parents; their needs, and even their thoughts are subsumed under the adult agenda.... Indeed, many adults who are trapped in very unhappy marriages would be surprised to learn that their children are relatively content. They don't care if mom and dad sleep in different beds as long as the family is together....

A second myth is based on the premise that divorce is a temporary crisis that exerts its more harmful effects on parents and children at the time of the breakup.... The belief that the crisis is temporary underlies the notion that if acceptable legal arrangements for custody, visits, and child support are made at the time of the divorce and parents are provided with a few lectures, the child will soon be fine. It is a view we have fervently embraced and continue to hold. But it's misguided.¹²

In many states, if you do file for divorce and you have children, you will be required to attend a two-hour class on divorce education before your divorce is granted. This class is not designed to tell you whether you should divorce but rather reviews how to deal with it to

have the least negative impact on children. It may be that some couples who file for divorce and attend the required divorce education class are among those who decide not to proceed with the termination of their marriage. Perhaps serious thought of the impact of divorce on children should precede filing for divorce as well.

4. MANY LATER REGRET DIVORCE

Once people have made the decision to divorce, how do they later feel about the choice? There may be some immediate relief in many instances right after the divorce, but how do husbands and wives feel months or even years later? My current estimates are that about one-third of the couples who divorce feel they made the right decision, another one-third are uncertain or have mixed feelings about their divorce, and approximately one-third of divorced couples eventually regret the decision within five years.

In addition, many divorced people in the United States apparently wish they had made a greater effort to make their marriage work. In Minnesota, 66 percent of those who are currently divorced answered "yes" to the question, "Do you wish you and your ex-spouse had tried harder to work through your differences?" In a New Jersey poll, 46 percent of divorced people reported that they wished they and their ex-spouse had tried harder to work through their differences. Research from Australia indicates that of people who divorce,

"one third regret the decision five years later. Of the individuals involved, two in five (40 percent) believe their divorce could have been avoided."¹³ A recent letter-to-the editor in a large U.S. newspaper reflected the sentiments of one man among the estimated one-third who regretted his divorce. Under the title "Divorce Isn't Worth the Cost," he wrote:

I would wish to comment on the letter that ran Jan. 2 concerning the weakening of men and children through divorce. Anne Smart-Pearce was the author. To my great sorrow, I must admit I am a divorced husband and father. Anne speaks of the terrible price that is being paid and then asks, "If a mother had an equal fear of losing her children, would she so readily seek a divorce? Or would she do all in her power to avert such a tragic outcome?"

Might I add this, husbands and wives, if there is even one-half of an ounce of friendliness left in your marriage, take each other by the hand, look at each other's eyes and then remember the love that brought you together in the first place! Let each other know, somehow, that you are needed, loved, and wanted! If you fail, you will reap the whirlwind, especially you, fathers. You will lose all that is important, near and dear to you. And that is your sweet wife, your wonderful children, and your home.

Oh, that I had been more wise and not let my pride be my downfall. I can tell you with

The following books deal with ways to strengthen marriages and with the realities of divorce:

- Diane Medved, *The Case Against Divorce* (New York: Donald I. Fine, Inc. 1989).
- Michele Weiner Davis, *The Divorce Remedy: The Proven 7-Step Program for Saving Your Marriage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).
- Michele Weiner Davis, *Divorce Busting: A Step-By Step Approach To Making Your Marriage Loving Again* (New York: Simon And Schuster, 1992).
- Judith S. Wallerstein, Julia M. Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* (New York: Hyperion, 2000).
- Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).
- Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, and Susan Blumburg, *Fighting For Your Marriage* (New York: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2001).
- Glenn T. Stanton, *Why Marriage Matters* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Pinon Press, 1997).
- James Dobson, *Love Must Be Tough: New Hope for Families in Crisis*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publishing, 1996). Contains suggestions for husbands or wives who are in the process of losing a spouse to another person, excessive hours at work, or various kinds of addiction such as drugs or pornography. The book is written from a strong Christian perspective.

*knowledge that a seemingly endless tragedy does await! The mornings do come when you awake, call her name, and then realize that you are alone in a house that is ever silent and does not answer back.*¹⁴

5. SHOULD COUPLES WORK ON THEIR MARRIAGE?

Nearly all, if not all, marriages go through peaks and valleys, times of highs and lows. Most of married life, however, is spent cycling between these two extremes. During difficult times, between 40-50 percent of currently married spouses seek divorce and follow through with it. And, as previously noted, about 20 percent of those who stay married consider leaving a marriage partner but later choose not to do so. The vast majority of unhappily married couples in the United States apparently do improve their relationship if they stay married. (See sidebars, pp. 25 & 29, for several suggestions on available resources.)

6. THE BIG BOUNCE BACK

Researchers have asked and then answered this question:

How many unhappy couples turn their marriages around? The truth is shocking: 86 percent of unhappily married people who stick it out find that, five years later, their marriages are happier, according to an analysis of the National Survey of Families and Households. Most say, they've become very happy indeed. In fact, nearly three-fifths of those who said their marriage was unhappy

in the late '80s and who stay married, rated this same marriage as either "very happy" or "quite happy" when interviewed again in the early 1990s.

*The very worst marriages showed the most dramatic turn-arounds: 77 percent of the stable married people who rated their marriage as very unhappy (a one on a scale of one to seven) in the late '80s said that the same marriage was either "very happy" or "quite happy" five years later. Permanent marital unhappiness is surprisingly rare among couples who stick it out. Five years later, just 15 percent of those who initially said they were very unhappily married (and who stayed married) ranked their marriage as not unhappy at all.*¹⁵

Also, it is important to note that, according to recent research, unhappily married adults who divorced were no happier or healthier five years later than unhappily married adults who stayed married, even if the divorced spouses remarried.¹⁶ Apparently divorce is not a good bet to make us happier and healthier. Indeed, the evidence is just the opposite.

7. CALCULATE THE FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF TERMINATING YOUR MARRIAGE

The financial costs to married couples for divorce are often substantial. These costs include legal or lawyers' fees, which average \$7,000 per couple (\$3,500 per person) in the United States.¹⁷ Some divorces cost

more; others less. An uncontested divorce involving no children in Utah costs between \$500-\$1,000. If the proceedings go to court and there is litigation, costs go as high as \$10,000-\$20,000 for legal fees. If there is a sizeable amount of property and prolonged litigation, costs could be \$40,000-\$60,000 and even as high as \$100,000 or more in some cases. The hourly wage for many lawyers today is \$200-\$300. The use of accredited divorce mediation services can help reduce the costs.

There will also be additional costs for housing, moving expenses, transportation, potential loss of income during divorce proceedings and transition, additional occupational training—particularly for custodial spouse of children (if children are involved)—child care, partial loss of retirement benefits, and sometimes additional costs to state government, extended family members, and charities if initial income is minimal. There may also be considerable financial consequences during retirement for husband, wife, or both.

Also consider that “Families with children that were not poor before the divorce see their income drop as much as 50 percent. Almost 50 percent of the parents with children that are going through a divorce move into poverty after the divorce.”¹⁸ Perhaps the greatest costs of divorce, however, are not financial, but the emotional costs that were previously noted.



LOVE LOST CAN BE REGAINED IN TIME WITH NEW SKILLS AND EFFORT.

8. THINK ABOUT THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR DECISION

Many who divorce are satisfied with the decision to end their marriage. But it is becoming increasingly evident that a significant number, as many as one-third, later regret their divorce. This is particularly so when the long-term consequences are experienced or actually encountered. Seriously consider not only the apparent immediate benefits of divorce but also the long-term consequences many others have experienced. Divorce is a decision that many make but later regret. And most divorces are forever.

9. TAKE TIME TO MAKE YOUR DECISION

The decision whether to divorce is one of the most important ones you will ever make. And if you do decide not to divorce right away and want to work on improving your marriage, take several months to do so. As previously noted, 86 percent of unhappily married

couples bounce back within five years. Your marriage, however, may not take as long to turn around. Also, be aware of questionable advice you may receive during this time from others, particularly peers who are divorced or unhappily married. Remember, love lost can be regained in time with new skills and effort.

10. USE DISCRETION WHEN SEEKING MARRIAGE COUNSELING

If you do seek marriage counseling, be very careful in choosing your therapist. Make sure the therapist understands your desire to work on improving your marriage, and ask your therapist to help you in this endeavor. Also, make sure the therapist has been trained in helping couples stay together, where possible. Professional and competent counselors will honor this request. Discuss the fees in advance, which range from \$60 to \$100 or more for a fifty-minute session. Many Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) currently do not pay for marriage counseling. In addition, if you seek personal counseling, HMOs will often determine whom you will see and the number of sessions you are allowed. Choose wisely from among the therapists allowed on your insurance program, if you have one. Remember: they are working for you and your marriage! Before you choose a counselor, review the article “How Therapy Can Be Hazardous to Your Marital Health,” by

William J. Doherty, Ph.D. Read his comments about “therapy-induced marital suicide.”¹⁹

Although marriage counseling with a competent therapist can be invaluable for some distressed couples, most couples turn their marriages around without formal counseling. Of course, many couples seek help from their religious leaders, with men generally preferring religious-based help.²⁰

11. CONSULT WITH YOUR RELIGIOUS LEADERS OR ADVISORS

If you and/or your spouse are religious people and belong to a particular faith or denomination, I urge you to seriously consider talking to your religious leaders. They often are a great source of hope and encouragement by adding the spiritual dimension to marriage during difficult times. Consider attending religious services while you are making your decision about divorce. Married couples who do attend religious services on a weekly basis have a one-third lower divorce rate than those who do not.²¹

12. LEARN FROM OTHER MARRIED COUPLES WHO HAVE BEEN AT THE CROSSROADS

There are couples in the United States who have seriously considered divorce and then decided to work on their marriages and stay together. Some of these couples are available to conduct seminars and workshops. One such national and



THE FIRST BOND OF SOCIETY IS MARRIAGE.

nondenominational group is *Retrouvaille* (A French word meaning “rediscovery” and pronounced “retro-vi”.) When both husband and wife attend *Retrouvaille* meetings and work at their marriage, the success rate of staying together is 85 percent.²²

13. REMEMBER THE 9/11 ALERT

Almost everyone in the United States will remember September 11, 2001 (ninth month, eleventh day) when the two planes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City and another plane crashed into the Pentagon Building in Washington, D.C., and fourth in Pennsylvania. We all witnessed over and over the tragic details of these events and the aftermath as it was broadcast again and again on national and local television programs. These vivid images will likely remain with us for many years to come.

What some may not know, however, is that immediately following these tragic events, many married couples withdrew

their applications for divorce on file before September 11, 2001. In Houston, Texas, for example, “Dismissals in divorce cases have skyrocketed in the Harris County Family Law courts since the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Family-law cases, the vast majority of which are divorces, have been dismissed in nearly three times the volume in the days after the tragedy as in the days before it.”²³ Similar trends apparently occurred elsewhere, although they did not last long.

What does this brief trend after September 11, 2001, suggest? Why were so many military personnel married in the following weeks before they were deployed for duty abroad? Why is it that in times of crisis we place higher value on marriage and family relationships? Michael Von Blon, a family law attorney in Texas, stated that in times of tragedy, “people stop and think about the most basic things in life: companionship, love and family” (ibid). Why do we need a national tragedy to remind us, once again, of the importance of marriage and family relationships? Apparently, such events help us realize the value of ancient wisdom:

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him

*up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*²⁴

In presenting this information, I have tried to provide a balance by first noting that there are situations when divorce is warranted. It is evident that some individuals are better off not married to each other. I also have indicated and stated the reasons why I believe it is beneficial for many, if not most, husbands and wives to stay together and work through their differences in their marriage. Hopefully, married couples will take the time to make an “informed decision” when contemplating divorce.

Over two thousand years ago, Roman statesman and orator Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) stated, “The first bond of society is marriage.” I believe it still is.

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¹¹ Lisa Laumann-Billings, and Robert E. Emery “Distress among Young Adults from Divorced Families,” *Journal of Family Psychology*, 14 no. 4 (Dec. 2000): 671-87.

¹² Judith Wallerstein, Julia M. Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, A Twenty-Five Year Landmark Study* (New York: Hyperion, 2000) xxiii-xxiv.

¹³ William J. Doherty, “Questions and Answers on the Minnesota Covenant Marriage Option,” (University of Minnesota, 1999). Available at www.smartmarriages.com.

¹⁴ Guy M. Bradley, “Letters to the Editor” *Deseret News* (11 Jan. 2001) A-10.

¹⁵ Linda J. Waite, Don Browning, William J. Doherty, Maggie Gallagher, Ye Luo, and Scott M. Stanley, *Does Divorce Make People Happy: Findings from a Study of Unhappy Marriages* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2002) 148-49.

¹⁶ Waite, *et. al.*, *ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷ Steve Nock, “Calculating the Financial Cost of Divorce” Presentation at the Smart Marriages Conference, Washington, D.C. 1999).

¹⁸ Fagan and Rector, *ibid.*

¹⁹ See www.smartmarriages.com.

²⁰ Waite, *et. al.*, *ibid.*, 29.

²¹ David B. Larson, James P. Sawyers, and Susan S. Larson, “The Costly Consequences of Divorce: Assessing the Clinical, Economic, and Public Health Impact of Marital Disruption in the United States” (Rockville, Maryland: National Institute for Healthcare Research, 1995) 26.

²² See website at www.retrouvaille.org.

²³ Mary Flood, *Houston Chronicle* (25 Sept. 2001).

²⁴ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

The following websites contain valuable information on strengthening marriages:

- www.utahmarriage.org
Created with Utah residents in mind. Married couples and/or individuals can access information and/or helpful resources.
- www.divorcebusting.com
Has many tips for helping couples with marriage. Michele Weiner Davis has also created a ten-hour audiocassette program and work book titled “Keeping Love Alive” marketed at this website.
- www.smartmarriages.com
Created and maintained by Diane Sollee. The Web site lists a number of current articles on marriage and marriage education programs available throughout the United States. Organizations promoting marriage are also listed.
- www.marriagemovement.org
A twenty-nine page document describing the current Marriage Movement in the United States. You are invited to endorse the document.
- www.family.org
Has many helpful materials on marriage from Focus on the Family, a Christian Organization founded by Dr. James Dobson.
- www.divorcereform.org
Contains trends in divorce reform legislation in the United States and some interesting statistics on contemporary divorce.

NEWS

NEW STUDY FINDS SPOUSES OFTEN MIRROR EACH OTHER'S HEALTH

A new study by a Brigham Young University professor shows a strong association between the health of people and the health of their spouses.

"It turns out that the health of your spouse is as strong an indicator for your own health as your economic status—two proven health indicators," says Sven Wilson, an assistant professor of political science who specializes in health economics and demography. His study is reported in the September 2002 issue of the *Social Science and Medicine Journal*.

"When addressing health issues, physicians and policy makers should remember the patients involved will often have spouses likewise struggling with their health," Wilson says. "Consequently, many health policies should be focused on families, not just individuals." He also said that individuals who have an ill spouse may want to reevaluate their financial plans, since a partner's condition may be an indicator of their own undetected health problems.

Previous research has established that married individuals are collectively healthier than singles. In this study, Wilson wanted to test his notion that individuals within marriages would often mirror one another's health. He obtained lifestyle and demographic information gathered from more than 4,700 couples in their 50s from the Health and Retirement Study, a 1992 nationwide survey. He then used statistical models to test how much the subjects' traits influenced their overall health, as measured by three different diagnostic tools.

Wilson found strong evidence for a correlation in spouses' health. For instance, a man in his early 50s who is in excellent health has about a 5 percent chance of having a wife in fair health and a 2 percent chance of being married to a wife in poor health. But a man in poor health has 24 percent chance of being married to a woman in fair health and a 12 percent chance of being married to a woman in poor health.

Wilson says several factors explain much of the correlation he found. "We know that people tend to choose spouses with similar backgrounds, and we also know that level of education and economic status are proven indicators of health status," Wilson said. "So if people with the same health-related characteristics are marrying each other, it stands to reason they would have similar health."

Wilson also found that couples tend to make similar choices after they are married that will affect their health, such as how much to smoke, drink, or what foods to eat.

He also suspects other causes for the correlation he found between spouses' health—factors that were not observable in the data he studied.

"Spouses obviously share environmental risks—they breathe the same air and are exposed to the same germs," Wilson said. "Another factor at work is that spouses share many of the same emotional stresses, such as problems with children. There is also the burden of



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being a caregiver for a spouse in poor health, which may take a significant toll on the caregiving spouse."

Because of the propensity for shared illness, Wilson emphasizes the need for the national healthcare debate to acknowledge the importance of examining solutions at the household level, rather than the individual level.

"When spouses find themselves both in poor health, they each lack the support a healthy spouse would provide and both face the additional stress of dealing with the sick loved one," Wilson said. "In these cases, two sick spouses add up to a serious drain on the financial and other resources of the family and the public."

--Michael Smart

MARRIAGE & FAMILIES KICKS OFF FUND-RAISING CAMPAIGN

Since its inception in December 1999, *Marriage & Families* has been sent to tens of thousands of interested readers throughout the United States and Canada. Published by the BYU School of Family Life, *Marriage & Families* disseminates scholarly-based material in support of families and family values. Its audience includes educators and researchers; government and religious leaders; mental health practitioners; as well as husbands, wives, and parents.

By design, *Marriage & Families* is a free publication, available to anyone wishing to receive a subscription. And that will continue to be the case. At the same time, as many readers have recognized the value of this unique magazine and have indicated an interest in providing financial support for the magazine. To accommodate those wishing to support the magazine, the School of Family Life has decided—in conjunction with its ongoing fund-raising efforts—to begin raising an endowment, thus ensuring *Marriage & Families'* continued influence and viability.

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Checks should be made out to School of Family Life, indicating that the donation is for *Marriage & Families* magazine.



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*“Live joyfully with
the [husband or] wife
whom thou lovest.”*

—ECCLESIASTES 9:9

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