MARRIAGE & families
EDITOR’S NOTES

I DID THINGS RIGHT AS A DAD, BUT I WASN’T HOME ENOUGH...

When our kids were growing up I did some of the things Jeff Hill writes about in his article. But, as a busy pediatrician, I was gone far too much. On the good side, each of our six kids had turns traveling with me to meetings and often went back to the office with me for emergencies, like stitching up cuts. But I needed to be at home more—including getting there for dinner. I wish I'd read Jeff's article a long time ago. I hope you will—and then will do a better job than I did.

Don’t miss Elaine Walton's article about forgiveness as part of healing and the related story. No matter how bad the hurt, or abuse, has been in your life—or in the life of someone you are trying to help—read this one.

Then there’s Richard Miller’s report on the misleading idea that children make their parents dissatisfied with marriage—an unsupported theory that is sometimes taught. Linda Waite’s talk is a fine introduction to her book, with Maggie Gallagher, The Case for Marriage. Alan Hawkins reviews their book and two others about children and marriage. Be sure to read these articles—and the three books, if you can.

Now, after the privilege of helping create this publication, it's time to say goodbye. Mary Ella and I are off to serve a mission. In addition to sharing our testimony of Jesus Christ, we will be medical advisors for the Church in Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and India. Our job is to keep our missionaries healthy and when there's a problem to get them the best care possible—in an area more than 6,000 miles wide.

So what about the magazine? Don't worry. With Lisa Hawkins as editor, Tom Holman as faculty adviser, and a great editorial board, it's in good hands. It will continue to be filled with credible data that support time-tested values—that's fun to read without needing to be decoded.

So as I say goodbye, I hope you'll spread the word about the "m" word, MARRIAGE, while building your own strong marriage and family.

With love and thanks,

Glen C. Griffin, M.D.

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Everyone in our family loves music. Some are more talented than others, but we all really like to sing and play diverse instruments. The other day I had just come home from a hectic day at work and wanted some peace. I opened the door and was overwhelmed by a loud cacophony of sound. Abby boisterously fiddled away in the laundry room. Aaron blared out jazz on the trumpet in his bedroom. Hannah enthusiastically bowed her way through a beginning cello book in the living room. And dear Emily turned up the volume on our electric piano as she raced through a hymn, “God Speed the Right.” The dissonance was ear-splitting and added pain to my headache.

A few days later I had a different experience. The children joined several others in our living room to sing and play Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus.” This time Abby’s violin was sweet and beautiful. I enjoyed Hannah’s tenor line on the cello. Instead of playing the piano, Emily sang alto. And as Aaron’s trumpet punctuated “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lords,” I could not hold back the tears as I attempted to sing, “And He shall reign forever and ever.”

The two experiences were opposites. I know that the total dissonance of the “family band” will not be an everyday experience, any more than the inspiring joy of listening to my children sing and play the “Hallelujah Chorus” will happen every day. But seeking some balanced point between cacophony and beautiful worship in bringing music to our home seems like settling for mediocrity. After all, the dissonance of daily practice results in the harmony and beauty of our concerted efforts. “Seeking balance” just isn’t the right metaphor.

So it is with work and family. For many years,
“balance” has been the predominant work-family metaphor. As we struggle to juggle our jobs and our home lives, we think of ourselves “walking a tightrope” and involved in a “balancing act.” We often feel “out-of-balance” and, like the first example given above, sense dissonance in competing aspects of life. We grapple with whether to work late on an important project or leave early to attend a daughter’s softball game. We agonize about whether to postpone a family vacation because a business deal is looming. With a “balance” metaphor, work is the irreconcilable nemesis of family life.

Maybe there’s a better way to think about this. Stewart Friedman has come up with a fresh idea. In an intriguing Harvard Business Review article, “Work and Life: The End of the Zero Sum Game,” he and two colleagues maintain that work and family life are actually complementary, not competing priorities. Success at work often contributes to success in one’s family and vice versa. Similarly, practicing a musical instrument contributes to successful performance, which motivates further practice and leads to greater achievement.

Instead of “balance,” perhaps a metaphor of “harmony” would more richly capture what individuals do to manage the demands of their work and families effectively. It’s empowering to think of ourselves as the composers, lyricists, orchestrators, and performers of our lives. It may give us inspiration to find a “Hallelujah Chorus” experience where we bring together many challenging aspects into a great symphony of life.

Using the harmony metaphor, work and family questions are not necessarily, “How can I limit my work time so that I can balance my family life?” or “How can I get out of the house more so I can have more time at work?” Other, more helpful questions come to mind, like: “What am I learning at work that can help me have a better family?” or “Are there possibilities for overlapping work and family time in harmony?” Let me share seven practical thoughts about harmonizing work and family life.

1. **Create energy—crescendo with vigor**

Recent research indicates that it is the depletion of energy as much as the time spent at work that explains the dissonance between work and family. When you feel like your job is sapping your energy, you have little vigor left for your family. The assumption that by simply cutting back hours you will create more harmony is erroneous.

One suggestion to increase your energy without cutting hours is to make a list of all the things you do at work that either drain or energize you. To create more work/family harmony, see if you can arrange to do the energizing things right before you go home. For example, if clearing your e-mail box or getting the next workday organized helps you to feel in control and ready to get started next time without delays, that may be the thing that energizes you and allows you to go home without worrying about work. Then you will carry more energy to your family.

You might also use commuting time for renewal rather than depletion. Instead of tuning the radio to news, sports, and commercials, listen to inspirational books, music, or scriptures on tape. After the incessant tapping or pounding staccato of many jobs, we often need a peaceful, melodic adagio for renewal before walking in the door at home.

2. **Carpe Diem—seize quality time**

All time is not created equal. In our life’s symphony there are times when work should back off and let family take the melody, and vice
versa. Many involved parents strive to increase the quality of the time they spend with their children. One father found that when kids walked in the door from school they were most willing to interact. Early afternoon was also low energy time for him at work. He found that if he left the office for home a couple of afternoons a week, he could miss rush hour, take a half-hour break with his children, and then finish up his workday at home.

Bedtime can also be high-quality time. Few kids really want to go to sleep and so they will let their parents read to them or tell them stories or sing them songs for as long as they want. The tender interaction with a parent as they fall asleep may stay with them throughout the night.

3. Do two things at once—use shadow time harmoniously

In time-use research there is a concept called “shadow” time. Shadow time captures the time spent in a secondary activity that is occurring simultaneously with a primary activity. Using the idea of shadow time, there are many opportunities for work and family activities to overlap without dissonance. For example, I recently brought my 12-year-old daughter Hannah to my university office for the morning. While I engaged in my primary activity of writing a boring scholarly article, she enthusiastically organized all the books in my office library. Every few minutes we interacted briefly, and then at noon I took her out to lunch. Using shadow time, I got a full morning’s work done and made a memory with my daughter at the same time.

The same concept applies to running errands at home. For example, when you need to go to the store, one way to promote harmony is to take a child along with you. While doing your primary activity of shopping, shadow time can help you connect with a child one-on-one while you travel to and from your destination. At the store you can teach your child how to comparison-shop. In our home we have modified a famous credit-card slogan to say, “Never leave home without them.”

4. Focus on one thing—unison

Notwithstanding shadow time, there are other instances when it is better to set firm boundaries and not let work’s basso profundo overpower the gentle melodies of family life. In my experience, keeping the Sabbath day holy is a key to focused harmony. Bob Egan, an IBM executive, told my work and family class that he made a promise never to work on Sunday, and he never has. He said it feels good to tell his children, “Sunday is a special day, a day different than other days of the week. Daddy doesn’t go to work on Sunday.”

Family vacation may be another time for muting work completely. In today’s wireless world of laptops, palm pilots, and pagers it is easy to let work bring dissonance to the delicate tunes of vacation renewal. A few years ago I took my wife and three of our children to enjoy the Big Island of Hawaii for an eight-day vacation. I brought my laptop with the thought that I could log on a few minutes each day and keep up with my e-mail. However, the few minutes turned into a few hours

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each day. It seemed that even when playing with the kids in the surf I would be thinking about a work project or seething inside at my manager's latest insensitivity. On the second day of vacation, my boss firmly demanded (via e-mail) that I join an important 9:00 a.m. conference call the next morning. After replying that I would attend, I realized that the 9:00 a.m. call in New York would be 3:00 a.m. Kona time. Sitting in on that tense conference call in the wee hours of the morning, as the sound of the surf resonated in the background, I reached my limit. I asked myself, "What am I doing? I'm supposed to be on vacation!" So after the call I locked up the laptop, put away the calling card, and crawled back into bed. I made a resolution that from then on I would throw off my "electronic leash" whenever I went on vacation.5

There are other daily and weekly times when it is best to disconnect from work entirely. Some families have a devotional time dedicated to daily spiritual renewal through prayer and reading the scriptures. Some set aside an evening for a family activity and don't allow anything to interrupt this weekly opportunity.

5. Be flexible in when and where you work

Recent research indicates that those with flexibility and control in when and where they do their work are much better able to find harmony between their work and family life.6 Given the same number of work hours, these flexible workers report both higher productivity and greater harmony in their family lives.

Sharing my own experience with telecommuting might be instructive.7 For thirteen years I struggled to juggle a demanding IBM career with the needs of my family. In 1990 I started working from my home office, instead of an IBM facility. The difference in my life was immediate. Instantly I gained an hour a day because I did not have to drive to and from work. Instead of dragging into work and needing to unwind after a "fast-lane" commute, I could roll out of bed early with an exciting idea and immediately key it into the laptop. Later I could get the kids up for family devotional and breakfast. Because I was working from home I could listen for baby Amanda while my wife Juanita went to aerobics, shopping, or ran errands. When Abigail had the lead in the fourth-grade play, I could be there on the front row at 11:00 a.m. When work got frustrating, I could put Emily in the jogging stroller and go for an invigorating run. The dissonance would dissipate and I could return to work refreshed. I usually took about 30 minutes off work mid-afternoon to visit with the kids when they came home from school. Jeffrey and I would often play a 10-minute game of one-on-one basketball.

On the work side I found myself more focused, energized, and productive. Without the interruptions of co-workers I was able to deliver higher quality products in less time. The arrangement worked so well that soon four of my colleagues were working from home with similar results. Within four years more than 25,000 IBM employees were working in what became known as the "virtual office."

6. Make your sleep peaceful—largo

What you do the last 30 minutes before retiring often determines how restful your sleep will be and how much in harmony you will feel in the morning. One father tells the story of
when he was leading a high-profile work project with an incredible workload. He would go to sleep only when he was utterly exhausted. Then it seemed he was wrestling with images of his problems even in his dreams. If he woke up in the middle of the night his mind would start whirring and it would be difficult to fall back to sleep. His life was dissonant and its tempo out of control.

Then he started taking a break to put his kids to bed with prayers, stories, and songs. It felt peaceful to do so. Even though it was only 9:00 p.m. he often would fall fast asleep and rest peacefully. It was not uncommon for him to get up at 4:00 a.m. and be rested and productive. Both his work and his kids were better off.  

7. Simplify your life—compose a modest melody

Voluntary simplicity—deliberately choosing to accumulate fewer possessions and engage in fewer activities—is a key to finding harmony in a busy life. With fewer voices in the score, it is easier to produce harmony. We live in a materialistic society where we acquire many gadgets and toys. These things have a high cost in time as well as money. When we have too much, we run the risk of obscuring the simple but powerful life melody we hope to compose. One easy way to moderate materialism is to stay out of debt. My father always told me, "There are two kinds of people in the world: those that pay interest and those that understand interest." He taught me, "Pay 10 percent to the Lord, 10 percent to your own savings plan, and live on the rest." Buy less, do less, and do fewer things at the same time. Look for a way to compose a life of modest means and focused time.

In summary, if we use harmony for our metaphor instead of balance, it may be more possible to compose a magnificent symphony of life where we find peace and shout "Hallelujah." Instead of "struggling at juggling," maybe we can seek for harmony as we both provide for and nurture our families.

E. Jeffrey Hill, Ph.D., is an associate professor of Marriage, Family, and Human Development at Brigham Young University.

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FORGIVENESS: PART OF HEALING

by Elaine Walton

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When someone hurts us—knowingly or otherwise—we may wonder if we would be helped by forgiving the offender. When wounds are deep and scars permanent, we may ask if it is even possible to forgive. We can say, “I forgive,” but still question if we have truly forgiven. We may not be able to decide if forgiveness is important or valuable.

Although the old “an eye for an eye” approach seems like a potential solution for the offended, that attitude never leads to a complete solution with all pain gone and all wounds healed. It only substitutes another’s pain for one’s own. This is substitution, not resolution. Revenge is never resolution. Revenge obscures the attitudes, beliefs, and prejudices that led to the original offense, rather than eliminating them. Forgiveness allows healing to take place regardless of the location or attitude of the offender.

Those who struggle with issues of abuse and injustice may have different views of forgiveness. One person may be reluctant to forgive, fearing the process will leave him weaker and even more vulnerable. Another injured person may subscribe to a
giveness is the process by which the injured person gains peace, freedom, self-acceptance, and release from self-pity, and through which wounds are healed. Forgiveness need not be connected to the offender's repentance. The offender may or may not be in a position to benefit from being forgiven by the offended person, but forgiveness definitely benefits the offended person who forgives.

Forgiving involves accepting responsibility for how one feels, acts, and responds. For example, if I loaned a friend some money and the friend didn't pay me back, I could follow that friend around forever, nagging and hounding. I could try to make him feel guilty for every pleasure he enjoys or desires—since he does not deserve pleasure while he still owes me money. I could dream about all the things I could buy if the loan were paid. No matter how small the debt, everything I thought about acquiring could somehow be linked to that hope of payment, and I could always use the unpaid debt as an excuse for not better managing my own finances.

At some point, however, I would have to decide whether to continue reminding the debtor that he owes me. I would have to balance the benefit of feeling free of the hassle and bad feelings connected to nagging the debtor against the benefit of having a vague hope and built-in excuse for my own problems, two of the advantages I enjoyed when I expected the debt to be paid. By forgiving the debt, I would not be sending the debtor a message that he somehow deserved the money—I would be freeing myself of that entanglement and empowering myself to go on without that burden. I would no longer give the debtor power to invade my thoughts and actions. By taking away that power, I would also transfer responsibility for "tending" the unpaid debt from the debtor to me. I would not take responsibility to pay the debt—that belongs to the debtor and could never be mine. But I could take responsibility to stop spending time in thought, action, or reaction concerning the debt. By taking that responsibility (as unfair as it once seemed), I would actually be free of the burden of tending the debt because I could choose to stop caring about it. I would be in charge of my fate and I could no longer use the unpaid debt as an excuse for my own financial ills.

Flanigan explained forgiveness in the context of an interpersonal transaction in which a moral law is violated. She defined moral law as "the voluntary agreement that sets the mutually defined limits of fairness between two people." When there is a breach of those mutually defined limits, injury results. If the injury is acknowledged and the offender repents, forgiveness is a natural response, even though it may still take time and be a painful process. When the injury is not acknowledged and the offender does not repent, forgiveness is still essential in the healing process. In fact, if there is no repentance by the offender, forgiveness may be even more important to the injured person, because he or she must take the initiative to become free from the pain rather than wait for the offender to repent. But when there is no repentance, forgiveness may not be a natural response.

Forgiveness: A Process

If repentance is a natural part of the forgiveness process, but the offender cannot or will not repent, then it would not be right for the offended person to be denied the benefits of forgiveness by the ignorance or refusal of the offender. The injured person may still gain the benefits of forgiveness through his or her own actions by taking steps that allow him or her to move forward. The injured person does not in any way feel guilt or accept
responsibility for the injury suffered through the acts of the offender. Nor is the injured person asked to minimize or trivialize the pain suffered at the hands of an offender. The injured person does not excuse the offender from repenting—no human being has the authority to excuse another from repenting. When the injured person takes steps to heal, it may not affect the offender in any way, but it can be a part of the victim’s recovery and survival. The offended person could consider the following actions.

Name the offense and recognize the injury. The offended person can name the offense and recognize the injury. Flanigan explained that to name the offense, the injured person must ask questions such as “What were the moral rules that were broken, and how did the betraying event break those rules?” “What is the meaning of the injury, and what are its consequences?” (e.g., “How am I more vulnerable? How has my belief system changed?”) Flanigan went on to explain that claiming or recognizing the injury is a process of exploring and owning. (“What specific losses have I sustained?” or, “What gifts have I received because of the injury—how am I stronger or different because of the injury?”)

Experience healing sorrow. In our compassion, we are tempted to spare the injured person from further sorrow. Certainly the injured may not wish to experience additional sorrow. It is appropriate, even desirable, for the offender to feel sorrow for the offense, but the injured person, we would agree, has experienced enough pain by being injured. Nevertheless, sorrow is part of the healing process for the injured. For many injured people, sorrow has been averted or camouflaged by anger, and in giving up that anger, one has to be willing to feel the sorrow that precipitated it. Sorrow is a natural response to loss and will come naturally as the injured person is able to name the offense and explore and claim the injury. Religious leaders (and even therapists) may try to expedite the healing process by jumping from identifying the injury directly to forgiving the offender—skipping the stage of sorrow. Sorrow is uncomfortable for others to watch, and for some, it may look too much like wallowing in misery. Wallowing usually means the offended person is stuck in the grieving process. Whining associated with wallowing may be a subconscious plea for help in appropriately identifying the losses and experiencing the grieving process in its entirety. Sorrow, as part of forgiving, is a necessary acknowledgment of the losses experienced in connection with the offense. The expression of sorrow may lead to a sense of restored wholeness and new perspective.

Break the silence. The injured person can benefit from disclosing the offense in detail to a confidante, therapist, or legal authority. Through disclosure, the injured person assigns responsibility, because recognizing the person responsible for the offense is prerequisite to forgiving. In order to heal and forgive, the injured person must recognize that something was wrong and someone else was at fault. Once the silence is broken and responsibility is established, the process of forgiving can proceed.

Prevent the offense from happening again. The injured person must do everything possible to prevent the offense from happening to the injured again. Although the injured may not be able to prevent an offender from re-offending, he or she can take protective measures against future injuries. At this stage, the injured person takes

HOW CAN I HELP?

We sometimes learn, to our sorrow, that a family member or friend was abused or victimized at some time in the past. That person may be trying to heal, with or without professional help. We may want to help, but may not know what to say—sometimes we’re afraid that anything we do will make the situation worse. Because I was once a victim of abuse and now consider myself a survivor, I’d like to share some things that are helpful and some things you may want to avoid in trying to love and support a person who has told you of past abuse.

First, however, there are people who are still suffering abuse—including children who may tell you or show signs that they are being abused. These people need immediate help. All states have mandatory reporting requirements for adults who suspect child abuse. Some states limit the requirement to teachers, doctors, and others most likely to observe injuries, but in some states, like Utah, all adults are required to report suspected child abuse to the police or the state agency charged with protecting children. Those who report child abuse under these laws are usually protected from liability if they acted in good faith. When the person who tells you of ongoing abuse is an adult, there usually is not a reporting requirement. Information on how to help should be available from a local women’s shelter or crisis hotline, listed in the white and yellow pages of the phone directory.
When the abuse took place in the past, here are some things you can do:

**Listen.** The person who is telling you about the past abuse has chosen you as a safe person to tell. As difficult as it is to hear about the victimization your friend endured, it is an honor to be chosen. Understand that the offended person may need to tell the story many times, and express additional details or trust that you will not find further details so repulsive that you are unwilling to listen any more. Conversely, a few injured people first tell the worst story they can think of, to see if you will reject them, and later share the real story after you have passed a “test” of trust.

**Encourage professional help.** The injured person, even with support and love from friends, family, and religious leaders, probably will not heal without professional help. Of course it is beneficial if your friend can pray for healing and ask God to help. Often, however, one of the most terrible results of abuse by a father or other male authority figure is the injured person’s confusion and difficulty in his or her relationship to God. In any case, a professional listener/helper may be able to help your friend learn how to heal and then to live with survival and healing. A religious leader, family doctor, local mental health clinic, counseling center, or nearby university program that trains counselors may be able to suggest two or three clinical psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, or marriage and family therapists who have been reliable helpers for people injured by abuse. The injured person can then make an appointment and, if the first professional doesn’t seem like a good “match,” can make other appointments until she or he finds someone who seems like a good helper and listener.

Therapy and counseling are often covered to some degree by health insurance. Some clinics and practice groups use a sliding fee scale for low-income clients. Providers of emotional health services are especially careful about client confidentiality. And although therapy may take a long time, those who have spent the time and worked to heal and free themselves from the burdens and sorrows they have experienced almost always feel the journey was worth the sacrifice.

**Don’t exceed your own abilities.** Listening is more important than any advice you could give, especially because there is incorrect conventional wisdom about almost every aspect of abuse. The media sometimes show incorrect portrayals of ways to help others. For example, you may believe from reading the previous article that your friend should seek healing through forgiveness. But not all injured people are ready to take the steps outlined in the article, and you are probably not the best person to see your friend through that process. You may have overcome difficulties by spiritual or intellectual means, by regular physical exercise or a popular herbal remedy. Even if your life’s experience had somehow been exactly identical to your friend’s victimization, you undoubtedly have a different spiritual, intellectual, and physical make-up than your friend. The treatments that have worked for your problems cannot be transferred through friendly advice to someone injured by abuse. He or she is likely to believe you don’t understand how painful and burdensome the victimization was and still is.

You may help best by encouraging the victim to find professional help, expressing your sorrow about and belief in the victim’s story, and being available, within reason, if the victim needs a listener. One thing you can do is monitor the victim’s moods and perspectives. Often, at the time of a major life transition, such as marriage, birth of a baby, a child leaving home, the death of a loved one, or a job change, a victim's perspective on the past abuse will change, for good or ill. Victims are at risk for depression, and a life transition could trigger a depressive episode. Without professional help, depression can lead to suicide, and your listening skills may alert you that your friend is depressed, or that he or she is becoming more depressed.

If your friend talks about suicide (don’t be afraid to ask), has a plan and can easily get the means to carry it out, or expresses thoughts such as, “The world (my family, my children) would be better off without me,” “If I were in heaven then I’d be healed,” or “I prefer oblivion to dealing with this pain,” you are faced with a medical emergency. If you know the name of your friend’s professional helper, you can call and say or leave a message that you are concerned that your friend is depressed or contemplating suicide. Even better, you may be able to convince your friend to make that call and arrange to get help soon. Most counselors make arrangements to see
Forgiveness: Reclaiming Power by Owning Responsibility

The process described above is designed to empower the injured. It provides a way in which they may prepare to forgive, even though the offender is restored either by the offender taking responsibility and accepting the consequences of his or her actions, or by loading resources to the depleted reserves of the offended person. The injured person cannot impose consequences on the offender, just as the injured person cannot repent for the offender. The injured's attempts to impose consequences on the offender are often destructive or counter-productive. For example, a wife may withhold affection as an attempt to punish an abusive husband, but the husband may not make the connection between the wife's lack of affection and his own abusive behavior. Or an injured person may mete out punishment by becoming an abuser and injuring others. Appropriate punishment, even if it could be defined, may not be within the power of the injured person.

More important than punishment is the power of the injured person to balance the scales by loading resources to depleted reserves. The injured can draw strength through support from a variety of resources (such as therapy, support groups, or informal support systems). By providing support to others who have suffered similar losses, injured individuals can also strengthen themselves, and become survivors rather than victims.

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offender has not repented. An appropriate question for an injured person is “How would you be different if your offender repented?”

Many injured people spend so much energy on revenge or validation, continually seeking assurance that the offense was real and he or she has the right to feel injured, that their lives are put on hold while they wait (and wait and wait) for justice. When one has spent so much energy seeking justice, it is hard to imagine a different life—a future free of the injury. One woman, who spent decades stuck in the groove of anger and bitterness responded to this vision of freedom by saying, “If my offender truly repented, and I could forget about this terrible injury, I think I would be spending more time with my own children instead of mourning my own lost childhood.” Another said, “I would be in school preparing for a meaningful career.” Another responded, “I would be thinner!” The injured often struggle with the vision of repentance and forgiveness because their “victim lifestyle” is accomplishing something for them, and change is frightening. Once the vision is realized, and injured people see themselves as whole, free, and in control, it then becomes apparent that being free and in control means being responsible.

However, new responsibility is often confusing (“Am I free from ... or free to ...?”). It is easy for injured people to talk about what they don’t want but often hard to talk about what they do want. When the injured envision themselves as educated, or slender, or having a satisfying career, or happily married, or fulfilling any other dream, it becomes clear who is in charge of making that dream come true.

The Joy of Forgiveness

When one has been deeply wounded, there is no way to forgive genuinely without experiencing a great deal of personal growth. The following statements, by wounded persons who were able to forgive, are manifestations of growth and insight.

I know that I cannot prevent harm from coming my way. It is the rare person who escapes being injured by a person she loves. I will remove myself from harm’s way when I can, but in the future I will know that injuries happen to everyone. Some of them I will be able to control. Some I will not. Knowing this, I am free. Forgiving will never again be so difficult.

It is essential to not excuse. You can forgive, but you must not excuse. Excusing means you believe there is some logical reason a person behaves the way he behaves. In cases like incest or beating, there is no logical reason. So excusing is dangerous. If we have free will, we are responsible for ourselves. Granted, things may affect our judgment, but it is our judgment.

You know, I’ve lost everything. It’s all been ripped off. I understand it, though; nothing is worth the hating.

I decided I’m not the teacher or the judge of who’s a failure or who isn’t. I’m not the scorekeeper. Everyone makes mistakes. So I think I must forgive.

After interviewing many victims of intimate wounds, Flanigan learned that those who were successful at forgiving became stronger and better able to take care of themselves. They made different choices about the people they let into their lives, but they didn’t stop being vulnerable. Instead, they accepted pain as a part of life and developed a new philosophy about people.

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7. Flanigan (note 4, above).
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A student once asked me, "Why would a couple want to have children when kids mess up a marriage so much?" He had just been exposed to the well-documented roller coaster of marital satisfaction reported in many textbooks on marriage and family life. This roller coaster—an irregular V-shaped line (usually called the "U-shaped curve")—plots a significant decrease in marital satisfaction beginning early in marriage. Husbands' and wives' satisfaction with marriage appears to continue sliding downhill to the time when teenage children are at home. At that point in time, parents' satisfaction with their marriage apparently reaches its lowest point. Later, when children leave home, the curve turns dramatically upward, showing increased satisfaction with marriage.

One of the most widely cited studies supporting the research described above was published in 1983 by Olson and his colleagues. The study included couples at various stages of family life, but all the information was gathered at the same point in time. (This is called cross-sectional research.) So a couple whose oldest child was 4 years old filled out the same questionnaire in the same month as did another couple whose youngest child just left home. The graph they created to illustrate their findings (Figure 1, below) has been reproduced in several textbooks.

![Figure 1: Commonly used graph indicating satisfaction with marriage over time.](Credit Comstock, Inc.)

The stages of the "family life cycle" used by Olson, et al., and many other scholars are: (1) couple without children, (2) couple with babies and preschoolers, (3) couple with school-age children, (4) couple with adolescent children, (5) couple "launching" children, (6) "empty nest" couple (no children at home), and (7) retired couple.
This generally accepted finding has led family scholars to conclude that this "roller coaster" of marital satisfaction is reality for the majority of marriages. However, these conclusions are based on research not appropriate to the issue of marital satisfaction over the life span. Couples who have divorced are not part of the samples used in this research. Their absence causes the average scores to go "up" in the later stages of marriage for the remaining couples, because only the more satisfied, still-married couples are left to participate in the study. Thus, the U-shaped curve appears to take an upward turn.

It would be better to do longitudinal research, where the same couple would fill out a questionnaire every few years to measure how their attitudes and perceptions of family life change over time. Recent longitudinal research, which follows the same couples over a period of time, has raised some important questions about the U-shaped curve. Further, the stages are based primarily on parents and their childrearing responsibilities, ignoring other aspects of family members' lives, which raises questions about the conclusions drawn from the research. Many other things, such as occupation, extended family involvement, and physical and emotional changes in marriage partners are ignored as possible influences on marital development. In summary, the family life cycle only describes families with children and ignores influences on the family and its members not related to parenting and children. It cannot be used by itself to explain changes in satisfaction with marriage.

Despite these criticisms, the family life cycle idea remains popular. Almost every family studies textbook continues to use it as a central organizing theme.

**The Long Run is a Good Run**

Much of the information family life educators teach their high school and college students about the course of marital satisfaction over the family life cycle is misleading. One misconception that influences discussions about the U-shaped curve of marital satisfaction occurs because the steep, dramatic slopes on the graph mislead the student to believe that people experience steep, dramatic negative and then positive changes in satisfaction with marriage.

Even Olson, et al., whose graph of the pattern is often used as an illustration (see Figure 1), reported, "these differences in satisfaction levels are small" and "of little practical value." The graph is scaled to emphasize the slopes: the range of the graph is only from 49 to 54. If the graph used the entire range of the marital satisfaction scale, the U-shaped curve would be much shallower—more like a dip in the road than a pothole. This is especial-
ly important considering that Olson, et al., found that a family's stage in the family life cycle explained only 1 percent of the couples' levels of marital satisfaction. The authors stress in their text that this is minimal. In spite of their words and in spite of the flawed use of a cross-sectional study, the graph has a dramatic visual impact. Many readers may be misled by the visual presentation despite explanations in the text.

Marriage Satisfaction is Sturdy
A close examination of the more recent, longitudinal studies of marital satisfaction indicates that marriages experience modest, not dramatic, changes over time. For example, Kurdek's analysis of the first four years of marriage indicated that the average decrease in satisfaction with marriage among wives was 1.80 on a scale ranging from 0 to 50. Husbands in the study had an average decrease of 1.75 during the same time interval. In another study, White and Edwards analyzed the impact on satisfaction with marriage of launching the last child. They found that, although the effect was statistically significant, it was only a 1.10 point increase on the marital happiness scale. With the scale ranging from 11 to 33, an increase of 1.10 is extremely modest.

Using other methods, Johnson, et al., found that what a person said about his or her marriage at one point in time was highly correlated (.89 to .94 on a .00 scale) with what the same person said about his or her marriage at other points in time. Indeed, the levels of stability remained high, regardless of the length of marriage among the couples.

A stable pattern of satisfaction with marriage over time seems to continue throughout the course of marriage. Cole reported that the strongest predictor of satisfaction with marriage in later life is the couple's level of satisfaction in the early years of the marriage. Satisfying relationships generally continue to be happy over the course of the marriage. These couples are able to adjust when they encounter transitions and stress, while maintaining a satisfaction with the marriage.

Contribution of Family Systems Theory
Family systems theory suggests that relationships have considerable continuity over time. When a marriage begins, the husband and wife each develop ways of relating and subjective evaluations of the relationship. Once these patterns are in place, the marriage develops a sense of equilibrium, or balance. The established patterns of relating and evaluation are remarkably unyielding to much change, even when stresses and new situations are introduced into the marriage. Significant transitions, such as the birth of a child, a child leaving home, or retirement may create some fluctuation in the marriage, but after a period of adjustment, the couple generally returns to their balanced patterns. Consequently, there is relative stability and continuity in marriage over the life of the family.

Family systems theory contrasts to the family life cycle's focus on transitions and change. However, studies suggest that both perspectives offer insight into the course of satisfaction with marriage. Both stability and change characterize marriages over time. Family systems theory and the family life-cycle perspective complement each other to help us understand stability and change in satisfaction with marriage. Both theories help us understand why the changes are generally modest and why most marriages experience substantial continuity.

Don't Blame the Kids
One of the most destructive, misleading characteristics of the research using the cross-sectional studies resulting in the U-shaped curve is that it attributes dramatic negative changes in marital satisfaction to changes in parenting responsibilities. As noted above, changes in satisfaction with marriage are small, not dramatic. And because the stages in the family life cycle are by definition linked to changes in the ages and activities of a couple's children, there is no other related event (much less cause) available to

Parents can help by assuring their children that they are loved and welcome as part of the family and are not responsible for any problems in their parents' marriage.
explain the small changes in satisfaction with marriage. The reasoning is circular—the child-related events in a couple's life are used both to define and explain their satisfaction with marriage. Longitudinal studies suggest that the decline in satisfaction with marriage during the early years of the marriage is not caused by parenthood. Studies that include control groups generally have found no differences between couples making the transition to parenthood and comparable childless couples. Rather, any increased marital dissatisfaction at the time the first child is born is most likely to be the result of issues that have existed since before the marriage, and not the result of the transition to parenthood.

In addition, scholars commonly assume that the low points in the U-shaped curve are caused by the parental stresses of rearing adolescent children. However, evidence from research suggests that other factors, in addition to the presence of adolescents in the home, cause decreases in satisfaction with marriage during this time. Steinberg and Silverberg interviewed 129 couples twice over a year. They found that an emotionally distant relationship between a parent and a same-gender adolescent child at the time of the first interview significantly predicted lower marital satisfaction at the time of the second interview. However, wives' concerns about personal midlife identity issues also predicted lower levels of marital satisfaction at the second interview. These findings suggest that parents' individual development also influences changes in the quality of marriage over the life course in important ways. Cross-sectional research suggests that couples' employment and economic conditions also have an influence on satisfaction with marriage during this period of the family life cycle.

The two studies that examine the "upturn" of the U-shaped curve show some influence of "launching" children on satisfaction with marriage. However, no longitudinal research addresses other sources of change or influence on satisfaction with midlife marriages at the same time children are leaving home. Certainly we cannot attribute all of the modest changes in marital satisfaction to children moving out of the house.

The Average Couple Isn't You

These findings, that the average marriage experiences a modest decline in satisfaction during the first few years of marriage, regardless of parental status, suggest that there is a "duration effect." That is, there is a natural decline in reported satisfaction with marriage after the honeymoon. Perhaps greater familiarity with the spouse, which comes with extended interaction, leads to a more realistic appraisal of a partner's positive and negative behaviors and traits. Further, differences in expectations concerning marriage may lead to dissatisfaction. For various reasons, there is typically a small decline in a couple's evaluation of their relationship during the early years of marriage, regardless of their parenting status.

On the other hand, maybe you aren't the average couple. The U-shaped curve represents the average of all the people in the study. This means that there are probably some couples whose marital satisfaction goes up throughout their marriages. But the "averaging" done by the statistical procedures used doesn't show that.

**How Parents and Teachers Can Help**

Young people—especially those anticipating and preparing for marriage—seem to be unaware of the misinterpretations of the U-shaped curve of marital satisfaction. They may misinterpret the data and come to believe that children cause unhappiness for married couples. Parents can help
by assuring their children that they are loved and welcome as part of the family and are not responsible for any problems in their parents’ marriage. Family life educators must fully understand flaws in interpretation of the U-shaped curve in order to provide a more complete picture to their students. Unfortunately, information contained in family textbooks and used uncritically by family life educators is likely to perpetuate misconceptions of the meaning of the U-shaped curve.

The implications of teaching the unsupported idea that children negatively affect their parents’ happiness are significant. The idea that a decline in satisfaction with marriage is primarily due to becoming a parent can have a negative influence on couples’ attitudes toward having children. Likewise, it would be unfortunate for young people to believe that the only cause of marital struggles during the middle years is the presence of adolescent children in the home. Such a conclusion uses the children as scapegoats while ignoring the many issues that face mid-life adults and mid-life marriages.

The findings that marriages are generally characterized by continuity, in addition to change, also have important implications for family life educators. The early months and years of a marriage are crucial to developing a satisfying relationship. These early ways of relating and the feelings and emotions that develop about the marriage become fairly set. Although it is important to teach students about the developmental stresses and challenges that require adjustments in marriage, the adjustments need to be placed in the context of a stable relationship. Most important, couples need to know that overall marital satisfaction in long-term marriages is mostly positive—the dips are not dramatic and wrenching, they are minor and gentle.

**Conclusion**

Although the U-shaped curve represents the “average” of many people’s marital satisfaction, it doesn’t mean that couples are doomed to experience the same downs and ups in their marriages. Many marriages continuously get better throughout the marriage—even when children and teens are around. Research shows that marital satisfaction is generally quite stable over the life course, with only modest changes. Parenting responsibilities, especially during the early years of marriage, are not the primary cause of negative changes in satisfaction with marriage. In other words, having children does not harm your marriage in any significant way.

Clarifying these research findings will help teachers provide more accurate information to their students and, it is to be hoped, increase love in families as parents and children understand that children are not responsible for the quality of their parents’ relationship.

A couple can prepare for transitions and trials by forming positive ways of facing life together early in their marriage. Their positive approaches to marriage and to each other will lend stability and strength to the marriage throughout their lives.

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Linda Waite is a professor of sociology at the University of Chicago. This is an edited version of her remarks delivered on 14 November 2000 at Brigham Young University. Dr. Waite had recently published a book titled The Case for Marriage (Doubleday, 2000) with co-author Dr. Maggie Gallagher of the Institute for American Values.

The book (The Case for Marriage) began more than five years ago as a study that I was doing for the National Institutes of Health with Lee Lillard, an economist now at the University of Michigan. We studied the relationship between marital status and mortality—the chance that someone will die. We used a large national survey and followed people over eighteen years. Some started out unmarried, and got married, and then got divorced. We could look at how the risk of dying changed for that same person when he or she was became married or unmarried.

What we found was dramatic. We found, to summarize briefly, that married men and married women are much less likely to die than otherwise comparable unmarried men and women. Our results implied that in a group of one hundred 48-year-old men, about sixty-five of them would be alive at age 65 if they were unmarried. In the same group of one hundred men, almost ninety would be alive at age 65 if they were married. For married women, we found the same gap, but smaller. So for unmarried women about eighty of one hundred would be alive, and for married women about ninety of one hundred would be alive at age 65. For both men and women, there were large, consistent effects after taking into account all the other characteristics of the individual.

This being an academic project, I had to figure out what was going on—why married people were less likely to die. I found a lot of literature on health and health behaviors suggesting that married people were less likely to die in part because married people live healthier lives. At about that time I gave a presidential address for the
Married parents are better off and have a better environment to give to their children.

American Population Association in which I looked at some of my own and others' work about marriage. I think scholars working in many areas knew, in the little areas they worked on, that married people were better off, but nobody had put it together. I stepped back and had one of those "Voila!" moments; you know, where the bell rings and says, "Look, there's something big here." It's much bigger than the little things that we scholars tend to focus on, and I wanted to take these often obscure results from the General Social Survey, which the American public had funded almost all of our research, and I think that taxpayers almost never get anything back directly. Therefore, this was a story that I felt obligated to tell.

I also knew, because I've been trained as an academic, that my writing skills, if they'd ever been fabulous, had been distorted and perverted by my graduate training. I could only speak in jargon, so I probably wasn't the person to do all the writing. I joined forces with a writer, a nationally syndicated columnist, Maggie Gallagher, and together we wrote The Case for Marriage, which brings these research results and our interpretation of them to the general public.

What I want to do now is to tell you about five myths concerning marriage that are common in American culture and to tell you why they're all wrong. First I'll just run through the myths and then I'll demolish them.

The first myth is that divorce is usually the best answer for children when their parents' marriage becomes unhappy. When you ask people in surveys like the General Social Survey, "How much do you agree with the following statement: When a couple is unhappy, divorce is often the best solution even if they have young children," about 70 percent of the American public says they agree or strongly agree with that statement. It's become almost a moral imperative to divorce if you're unhappy, and as we'll see, there's something wrong with this picture.

The second myth is that marriage is mostly about children—"if you don't have kids it doesn't matter if you marry, stay single, or cohabit." The third myth, which I hear all the time, is, "Isn't marriage good for men and bad for women?" I'll tell you where that myth arose and why it probably never was right, and why it certainly isn't true now.

The fourth myth is that promoting marriage and marital obligation puts women at risk for domestic violence. In fact, the first objection I heard to the Population Association talk was "What about domestic violence?" In the book I did analyses on domestic violence and I can show you that this myth is wrong, too.

The fifth myth is that marriage is essentially a private matter—just between the two people involved; that it's an affair of the heart between two adults and that no outsider, not even the children of the marriage, should be allowed to affect or interfere with it.

• Myth one: when a marriage becomes unhappy, divorce is usually the best solution for the sake of the children. There's an impressive new book, The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, by clinical psychologist Judith Wallerstein, and she addresses this issue directly. I'll just summarize. What she found in a study of sixty families, whom she's studied for 25 years, is that divorce has long-term emotional consequences for children, and she's studied these children through early adulthood. She argues that the negative emotional consequences for children of divorce crescendo in late adolescence and early adulthood; that the gap in emotional well-being between children raised in two-parent families and children of divorce widens as they get older. It does not shrink.

Some of the research I did for The Case for Marriage shows that in many cases, staying together is the best solution if the marriage
becomes unhappy. I used data from the National Survey of Families and Households to address this issue. Thirteen thousand adults were interviewed in late 1980s and again five years later.

At the first interview, one of the questions asked was, how they would rate their marriage on a scale of one to seven, "one" being just awful and "seven" being fabulous. I analyzed the people who had rated their marriages as bad in a couple of different ways. First, I looked at those who said, "On a one-to-seven scale, my marriage is a one." I then found the data for almost all those who had said their marriages were awful and looked at the same question when they were interviewed again, five years later. I found that only about 10 percent of the people who had said that their marriages were terrible had divorced. The vast majority had stayed together. Of those who said in 1987 that their marriages were awful, 87 percent said five years later that their marriages were either pretty good or very good, either a "six" or "seven."

I did the same analysis looking at people who said "one," "two," or "three"—anything bad—in 1987, and five years later, three-fifths of them were in the top two categories in marital satisfaction. We don't know if they got therapy, but most of them probably didn't.

Most of the marriages that were bad became much better. I think in a lot of cases when marriages are unhappy it's sort of a bad patch, and it doesn't last. One reason divorce is relatively high in our society is because now either person can leave, and we are more willing to leave than we used to be if we hit a bad patch. We're less likely to work it through. But there's evidence that dramatic turnarounds are commonplace. They're the typical experience.

- Myth two: Marriage is about children. Marriage brings huge benefits to men and women, absent children. Yes, marriage is the best situation for raising children, but childless married couples also benefit. Married men and married women live longer and more emotionally satisfying lives. They live healthier lives. Financially they are more successful. They have better sex lives than unmarried couples. One way that marriage helps children is by helping their parents. Married parents are better off and have a better environment to give to their children. When the parents are better off emotionally, physically, and financially, then children raised in that environment benefit.

- Myth three: Marriage is good for men and bad for women. This myth started around 1972 in a book by sociologist Jessica Bernard called The Future of Marriage. In this book Jessica Bernard argued that because there were a number of indicators that married men had greater emotional well-being than single men, they benefited from marriage. Because married women had worse emotional well-being on the same measures than married men had, the author concluded that men benefited from marriage more than women. Some of the evidence that married women were actually better off than married men was buried in an appendix.

Even in 1972 she found, as everyone else had, that married women were happier than single women. She reported the findings for men in the text of the book and reported the findings for women in the appendix. She discounted the positive results for married women with reasoning that, "Well, women are happy only because they are meeting a socially valued goal [marriage]. So, they're just doing what they're told. And that's why they're saying they're happy. But in fact, their psychiatric symptoms are at such a high level that we have to think they are just deluding themselves." She asserts in the book that some societies bind girls'
feet, but in our society, we bind girls' psyches, and marriage actually makes women crazy.

She did no original research for the book, and there were critiques when it was published, but the book and her message that marriage was bad for women came at a time when the women's movement was just beginning. Politically it caught a wave and entered the general culture as accepted wisdom. You still see her ideas in marriage textbooks, as if they were established fact—the earth is round and marriage is bad for women. I don't think the case for that conclusion was ever good.

In the meantime we've developed much better measures of psychological well-being and much better analytic measures. The world has changed in ways that have made marriage different for women than it used to be. The most recent research, which again uses the National Survey of Families and Households, looks at measures of emotional well-being when people were interviewed in the late 1980s. It follows them over the next five years and uses the same measures of emotional well-being again. During that period some of the people stayed married, some got married, some got divorced, some stayed divorced, some got married, divorced, and remarried, some became widowed—you can compare changes in emotional well-being, because you have the same measures for people in these different groups.

This research shows that if you take people who were married the whole time as the comparison group—the baseline—then all the others basically do worse on almost all nine measures of emotional well-being. The sole exception is people who got married for the first time—they did better. What is really interesting is they found no differences between men and women on any of the measures. For both men and women, the married did the best and everyone else did worse, except those who got married for the first time.

What's also interesting is there's because divorce is a strain. But, according to this argument, once you get through that transition, basically you're fine. It's just the transition that's rough. In fact, what they've found is that those people who were divorced during the five years from one interview to the other did substantially worse than the married people. So being in the transition created by divorce was a risk factor for poor emotional well-being, but being divorced, possibly several years after the transition phase, was also related to poor emotional well-being when compared to that of married people.

Jessie Bernard's conclusion that marriage is good for men and bad for women was based only on psychological well-being, but we've taken that message and applied it, or thought it applied, to marriage more generally. There was never evidence on any other dimension that marriage was a good deal for men and a bad deal for women, and there are lots of other dimensions to consider.

• Fourth myth: the marriage license is a hitting license. There's a well-known article titled 'Marriage License as Hitting License.' I think the title is more evocative than the paper. The paper is actually more moderate, but somehow we've come to believe that getting married puts women at risk of domestic violence. The popular press, politicians, and policy makers seem to agree. But the popular press combines the data for husbands with the data for boyfriends, ex-boyfriends, and ex-husbands, when the rates of domestic violence are much lower for married women than they are for unmarried women. The rates of all interpersonal violence are substantially lower for married

EVERYONE TREATS YOU AS A UNIT WHEN YOU'RE MARRIED.
IF YOU'RE NOT, THEN THEY TREAT YOU AS THOUGH YOU MAY BE HERE TOMORROW OR YOU MAY NOT.

an argument in the literature that divorced people are often upset, unhappy, and emotionally troubled
women than for unmarried women. What's interesting is that the rates of interpersonal violence are also lower for married men. The same things that put people at risk for violence generally put people at risk; however, violence among married couples is relatively low, being black, and being unmarried. Again, the National Survey of Families and Households asks people the extent to which arguments between them during the last year had become physical. And then, if they had become physical, whether one partner had hit, kicked, or shoved the other partner. And then, if that had happened, who had done it. “Did you kick?” “Did your partner kick?” Given that you know the gender of the respondent you can figure out male-to-female violence and female-to-male violence.

I looked at rates of violence for married couples and for cohabitating couples taking into account their characteristics—how old they were, how long they'd been together, their education, and their race. I found that for married couples, rates of domestic violence male-to-female are about the same as female-to-male. Therefore, when couples are violent, generally both are violent. Women are as likely to initiate violence as men are.

Now that's only part of the story because obviously the size difference means that if someone is seriously hurt, it's generally the woman. And this ignores serious violence of the kind that sends people to shelters and emergency rooms—which is almost exclusively man-against-woman. In addition, the proportion of people who said there had been violence in their relationship was about twice as high for cohabiting couples compared to married couples, and with cohabiting couples the male-to-female violence was higher.

The literature argues that there are different types of cohabiting couples, one being the engaged couples who are just waiting for their hall to be rented (e.g., they rent the hall for October and it's March), but on lots of dimensions they look very much like already-married couples. Then there are what I call the uncommitted cohabiters, who have no plans to marry and who look, on almost every outcome we can measure, worse. In looking at domestic violence I found that, although levels of domestic violence were lower for engaged cohabiting couples, they were still much higher than for married couples. So, if you had to make an argument against domestic violence, you'd say either never have a relationship with a man if you're a woman, and never have a relationship with a woman if you're a man, or you're better off married. If you're going to have a boyfriend, an ex-boyfriend, a husband, an ex-husband—someone you live with—you're better off to be married to that person. The argument is that when you get married, you become socially connected to a whole set of people who have an incentive to help you reduce violence. You have your wife's brothers, you have the people at work, and that actually helps— it inhibits violence in married couples. Also, because married couples have more to lose if the relationship ends, their commitment to the relationship reduces violence.

• Fifth myth: Marriage is a private affair of the heart. A lot of times what you hear people say in conversation is, "Oh, marriage. It's just a piece of paper." I think that this is the most pernicious of the myths. Marriage is much more than just a piece of paper. It's a commitment, it's a contract, it's a legally binding, socially, morally, legally and, religiously supported promise to stay with your spouse for the rest of your life, God willing. Everyone knows that things might go wrong, but you're promising to stay together. That commitment
changes how you treat each other, the choices that you make individually, and how everyone else treats you. For example, it's easy if you call your family doctor and say, "Hi, I'm Ralph's wife and I need to pick up his test results," "I need to change the appointment," "I need to arrange for . . . ." You can do that. If you call and say, "Hi, I'm Joe's girlfriend. Can I get . . . .?" the reaction will be different. Everyone treats you as a unit when you're married. If you're not, then they treat you as though you may be here tomorrow or you may not. But you don't have a long-term commitment to each other. If you're cohabiting, you're signaling to people that you don't want a long-term commitment. Otherwise, you'd be married. There's evidence that people who cohabit really want a different arrangement: they do not want marriage and so they organize their relationships differently.

**Marriage gives people someone to talk to about the most important things in their lives.**

How does marriage deliver the benefits I've alluded to?

- **First benefit, when people promise to stay together as a unit, what they're promising to do is work together as a team for the rest of their lives.** In the economic view, it's a contract, but that's not all it is. Still, the contract is powerful. It tells people they're going to be together, they're going to be a unit, they're going to share their fortune, and that allows them to specialize. From Economics 101, you know that if countries specialize and then trade, both are better off than if everyone tried to do everything. It's the same with people. If you try and do everything yourself, you can, by definition, be less adept at everything than if you pick the things you like, where you have natural talents, do those and hope you married someone who has different natural talents and different tastes. The other person can do the other things. The two of you working together produce more. The fact that you're married and you're committed to being married means that you can specialize and the two of you working together produce more than you would if you weren't married.

Married people produce more so they have more. But, and this is a really important point in my view, the specialization does not have to be a traditional, gender-traditional, specialization. I'm not saying that women should only work in the home and men should only work in the market, and that men should never diaper a baby and that women should never earn any money. How you specialize is not so important. You pick some things and the other person picks some things and you get good at them and then you trade—you do them for the whole family.

- **Second benefit is what economists call "economies of scale."** Two people cannot live as cheaply as one, but, according to the latest statistics from the National Academy of Sciences, two can live as cheaply as 1.65. So, if you join forces, you just move in together, and then you have more money. Now, cohabiting, people, or roommates, get these benefits, too. But the truth is most people don't want to live with someone they don't like. The benefits of marriage sort of equalize the irritating parts of having to deal with someone else in the house.

- **Three, marriage gives people a goal—a sense of purpose in life that's larger than they are.** A married man takes better care of his health in part because he's not doing it for himself, he's doing it for his wife, he's doing it for his children. A sense of purpose greater than self-interest means you can work hard at something that's not inherently meaningful and get meaning from it because you're doing it to support your family. You're not just living today. People would care if you died. Your life has purpose; your life has meaning.

- **Four, and this is almost never noticed, but marriage serves a valuable insurance function.** I found an article by two economists who estimated that the insurance value of marriage for a man in middle age—in his fifties—was worth about a 35 percent increase in wealth. Just by being married. That's the result of the vow to stay together, in sickness or in health, for richer, for poorer. If you get sick, I'll take care of you. How much does it cost? How much does
MARRIAGE GIVES PEOPLE A GOAL—
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long-term care insurance cost? A
fortune. But when people get
married, that’s what they get. I
have a graduate student whose wife
was diagnosed with multiple
sclerosis two years ago. He’s in his
late twenties. He drives her to
work. He drives her to the doctor.
Sometimes she can drive, some-
times she can’t. If she had to hire a
private nurse to provide all that
care, she could never afford it.
It’s worth a huge amount.

• Fifth benefit, marriage gives
people a confidant. It gives people
someone to talk to about the most
important things in their lives.
There’s some really interesting
research related to this, most of
it done by James Pennebaker. He
randomly assigned groups of
people to write essays. The people
who were in the treatment group
self-disclosed about a personal
problem, and the people in the
control group wrote about what
they did on their summer vacation.
Then they all put the essays in
a black box. They never got any
reaction. The people who self-
disclosed did better on many
measures for the next three or four
months—less illness and better
emotional well-being. He did this
types of research for executives
who had been downsized, and the
executives who self-disclosed found
jobs faster. Marriage gives people
someone to whom they can self-
disclose. What’s interesting is the
confidant doesn’t even have to
react. They never have to say
anything. They just have to elicit
your concerns and it’s extremely
powerful.

• Sixth benefit, there is some
interesting research suggest-
ing that physiological
functioning is
improved by marriage.
Our endocrine systems and
immune systems work better.
We’re biological beings. We de-
veloped to live in small, tightly knit
groups. There is evidence that sugges-
ts that our bodies work better
when we live in small, tightly knit,
emotionally supportive
groups.

I haven’t talked about sex—the
sex part of my book is work that I
did using a large study of sexual
behavior done at the University of
Chicago; the results of this study
were on the cover of Time magazine
in about 1994. I looked at sexual
satisfaction for married, cohab-
ting, and sexually active single
couples. I took into account their
other characteristics, attitudes, sex-
ual practices, how long they had
been together, health, whether
they had kids, education, and how
religous they were.

What I found was that both
married men and married women
reported higher emotional satisfac-
tion with sex than otherwise
comparable cohabiting men and
women. Among the sexually active
singles, the only people who
reported the same high levels of
satisfaction were people who
expected to be with their partner
for the rest of their lives—the
engaged singles. Something about
being married, especially for
women, increased their emotional
satisfaction with sex. I would argue
that marriage changes women’s
sexual behavior for the better—
certainly toward more sexual

exclusivity.

Let’s assume that you accept my
argument, that you buy my case
for marriage, that married people
are healthier, they live longer
lives, and they’re happier. But
popular culture or American
society believes these erroneous
myths, which are contradicted by
research—what do we do? What
I did was write this book to get
the evidence out to the general
public. But I think we need to
start a conversation about mar-
riage. In Washington, D.C., people
in the marriage movement talk
about marriage as the “M word.”
Listen to politicians talk about
marriage. They say family values.
They rarely—I would say never—
say, “We need to support mar-
rriage.” I think we have to talk
about marriage. It’s not the same
as any other family arrangement.
It doesn’t bring the same benefits.
Pretending that it does is not
doing anyone a service. I’m not
making a moral argument; I’m
making a public health argu-
ment—what’s good for you.
It’s not the only argument you
can make, but it’s a powerful
argument. We have to talk about
marriage. We have to talk about
it as an important institution,
and hope that as a result of
that conversation people will
become more aware of the benefits
of marriage. So, can I count on
you to spread the message? Thank
you.
As I write this review, the unfortunate marital break-up of Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman is splashed all over the tabloids. Inside the Beltway, Washington’s politicos and pundits are talking about strengthening welfare reform legislation to promote and support married, two-parent families. And on Valentine’s Day, I hurt my wife’s feelings when—well, I don’t need to go into all the details, but I checked my pride and apologized, and she apologized back, and we kissed and made up.

Fortunately, the books I’ve read during the past few months have prepared me to analyze these disparate events with a little more skill. The year 2000 produced important books on marriage and divorce in our contemporary culture. I have benefited from reading three books that I enthusiastically recommend. The first book has been publicly discussed more than the other two: The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce by Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee. If you watch or listen to the talk shows, read the national newspapers or news magazines, or listen to the casual conversation around the water cooler, you have probably heard about this book. Wallerstein began studying children’s experiences of divorce as a clinical psychologist in the wake of California’s no-fault divorce revolution in the early 1970s. She has followed a small, clinical sample of these children for more than 25 years now. Unexpected Legacy is the culmination of her unique effort.

Wallerstein’s conclusions are generating controversy. The effects of divorce on children are not as fleeting as their parents had hoped and been taught. Wallerstein and her co-authors claim that the effects are deeper, longer-term, and more troubling than most social scientists have suggested. Divorce rips apart a child’s world and irrevocably changes its direction. Its most harmful and profound effects are not visible until early adulthood, when children of divorce are trying to form intimate relationships. The authors assert that without an inner model of a loving, committed, stable marriage, children of divorce struggle to choose mates, are shy of commitment, and are at a clear disadvantage in finding and maintaining true love. But as if this shot across the bow of our divorce culture weren’t enough, the authors go even further. When faced with the question of whether children are better off if their unhappy parents stick it out for the sake of the children, the authors offer an unflinching, politically incorrect “yes” (with appropriate asterisks for situations of violence, abuse, addiction, and severe pathology). They base their assertion on a quasi-scientific comparison of these children of divorce with a group of their childhood peers whose parents were reportedly unhappy but stayed together nonetheless. In many ways visible to a therapist’s probing eye, these children of stable but supposedly unhappy marriages were better off as young adults than were their friends whose unhappy parents divorced.

As a researcher myself, I understand some of the critiques of Unexpected Legacy by those who have studied the effects of divorce in larger, nationally representative...
samples of children, and who find the negative effects less pronounced. There are inherent weaknesses in Wallerstein’s study that limit her ability to speak the final word on the effects of divorce on children. But Unexpected Legacy should not be read with that purpose in mind. It is better read, I believe, in a more personal way. That is how I found myself reading it. More and more, the objective researcher part of me sat back and the husband-of-a-child-of-divorce part of me came forward as I found myself better understanding things about my wife that have confused me over the life of our marriage. When I finished the book, I suggested she might be interested in reading a “biography about her life.” She read it, and more than once I saw her in tears, sad or angry about her experience of divorce. Not a book for the faint-hearted.

In many ways, the book was healing for my wife. I’m sure it will not feel quite that way for those readers who are struggling with the decision to divorce. As difficult as it may be, however, Unexpected Legacy, in its unflinching candor, is also the best advice book to date on the topic of divorce. Wallerstein understands how divorce affects children. Accordingly, she provides sensitive, child-centered advice on how to help children through this gut-wrenching change and the best list of “do’s” and “don’ts” for divorced parents I’ve seen. Her advice ranges from a caution about sending unaccompanied young children on airplanes to visit their non-custodial parent to a good, old-fashioned tongue lashing to divorced fathers who fail to help pay for their children’s college educations. By looking at divorce through a child’s perspective over the past quarter-century, I’m confident Wallerstein and her co-authors would first encourage Tom and Nicole, and others struggling in their marriages, to do the hard work of working things out.

And there is good news about that from another book I picked up right after I finished Unexpected Legacy. Although Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher’s The Case for Marriage won’t get quite as much talk-show time as Unexpected Legacy, I think it will ultimately have more lasting impact on revitalizing the institution of marriage in our society. Time after time it punches holes in the myths about marriage and divorce we have bought into in our society (see accompanying article, “Five Marriage Myths, Six Marriage Benefits”). For instance, it focuses a new light on the dilemma of staying married for the kids’ sake. We feel trapped by the question, “Should unhappily married spouses stay together for the sake of their children?” We don’t like the stark dichotomy of unhappy adults versus unhappy children. As it turns out, when a social demographer looks at this question, she dissolves the dichotomy in data. When you look at a nationally representative sample of married people who say they are “very unhappy” in their marriages, and follow them over time, 60 percent of those who stick it out (about 15 percent do not) say they are “quite happy” or “very happy” in their marriages five years later. Another 25 percent of couples report improvement in their marital happiness. This is the kind of data A

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APPARENTLY, UNHAPPY COUPLES AREN’T DOOMED TO A LIFE OF PERSONAL MISERY IN THEIR STOIC, CHIN-UP CHOICE TO STAY TOGETHER FOR THE KIDS’ SAKE.
that warms the objective cockles of my researcher's heart. Apparently, unhappy couples aren't doomed to a life of personal misery in their stoic, chin-up choice to stay together for the kids' sake, any more than people who choose not to drink alcohol at parties are consigned only to watch others have a good time. Similarly, Waite and Gallagher report research suggesting that only about one-third of divorces stem from high-conflict relationships. Two-thirds of divorces likely catch children by surprise because the conflict in the marriage is relatively low and not particularly visible to the children, more like the marriage portrayed by Michelle Pfeiffer and Bruce Willis in the recent movie, *The Story of Us*. These are the marriages that perhaps could remain healthy with more skill and care and could potentially be repaired with enough effort and help. By the way, Waite and Gallagher inform us that the divorce rate isn't quite as high as demographers predicted it would become a generation ago. It turns out that probably less than 40 percent of first marriages will end in divorce, not the 50 percent-plus figure that we always hear, and the rate has been declining slightly for the past decade.

*The Case for Marriage* brings together in one place the best research on why marriage matters. Waite brings impeccable research credentials to the task. In addition to a considerable intellect, Gallagher brings the gift of translating sophisticated research into language non-researchers can understand and appreciate. Together they make a timely and critical contribution to revitalizing the institution of marriage. From the best research, we learn that married people are happier, healthier, and wealthier than their unmarried peers. They even have more satisfying sex lives than their unmarried friends. And these benefits of marriage are not primarily an artifact of happier, healthier, wealthier, and sexier people marrying; rather, there is good evidence that marrying and keeping the marriage healthy produce many of these benefits, and leaving or never marrying subtracts from personal well-being.

*The Case for Marriage* provides me and other pro-marriage advocates a needed scholarly foundation. But it will be useful to a much broader range of readers. I believe we all need to better understand how much marriage matters to individual, family, and community well-being. We need to understand that marriage, far from being on the endangered social-species list, is a strong and vital institution with tremendous power to improve our lives. Perhaps fewer couples would choose to cohabit if they knew how their choice appears to work against their happiness, health, and wealth, not to mention their sexual satisfaction.

Moreover, cohabitation actually increases, not decreases, their risk of divorce if they later marry, according to Waite and Gallagher. Perhaps young adults would be
A happy, stable marriage continues to be the most important goal of almost every American adult. More enthusiastic about marriage if they understood its benefits. Perhaps we would all be more likely to protect marriage in our culture and in our laws if we grasped its value to our prosperity (and posterity). I think one of the most significant obstacles we face to strengthening marriage in our society is our collective ignorance about how valuable it is to our personal and social lives. A happy, stable marriage continues to be the most important goal of almost every American adult. That heart’s desire is not a nostalgic, indulgent dream of a simpler time that has now passed us by. Instead, it is an act of wisdom, and I applaud our politicians’ efforts these days to promote it, especially in low-income communities where the obstacles to marriage can be so high.

How do we make this dream of a happy, stable marriage come true in our own lives? The divorce rate may be less than 50 percent and declining, but you still wouldn’t get on an airplane with those odds of a crash. Fortunately, there have been some excellent books written lately by talented marriage scholars that are illuminating the path to the good marriage.* I just finished reading what I believe is the best one to date and the first one you should read. But the answer isn’t quite what you would expect. Blaine Fowers’ book, Beyond the Myth of Marital Happiness, does not focus directly on happiness in marriage. And you can tell by the title that Fowers’ book is not destined to be hyped on the talk shows. From front to back, Fowers challenges the prevailing cultural and professional position that marriage is about achieving mutual happiness. In fact, he calls our mythical inclination to define marriage as fundamentally an emotion-based, private love affair between two people as “one of the great tragedies of our time” (p. 219), one that makes achieving a happy marriage even harder. That’s not a statement calculated to help the book compete with all the “five easy steps to a constant, overwhelmingly passionate marriage” books out there.

Nevertheless, I think Fowers makes a crucial point that marriage to be successful over time, has to be about much more than romance. As such, Beyond the Myth works as a nice companion to Waite and Gallagher’s book. A casual reading of The Case for Marriage could lead us to believe that marriage is all about achieving the pleasures of life happiness, health, wealth, and sex. Fowers would disagree. “The romantic approach to marriage has been, in many ways, a noble and exciting [historical] experiment, but we know now that it has failed, and we must find another way to strengthen this vital institution” (p. 219).

What other way does Fowers recommend? The virtues of friendship, loyalty, generosity, and justice. In contrast, the typical approach to achieving the good marriage taught by educators and therapists and believed by most people is to emphasize strong communication skills. These skills theoretically allow couples to work through their inevitable differences and synchronize their wishes and desires into one mutually satisfying unit. This is backward, according to Fowers. For communication to work and for problem solving to be effective, spouses need to develop the virtues that sustain a deeper, richer love. Romance and emotion are fragile and fleeting in the face of ordinary, everyday life. But the partnership a couple builds when they share a noble purpose in life and work together to bring it about, when they give loyalty and act generously and fairly with each other—these are the virtuous actions that make marriage strong and steady and ultimately more rewarding. Fowers’ ability to help couples see the strengths they already have in their relationship and his wise suggestions for enhancing those strengths make this book a valuable read for all who want their marriages to endure.

So it turns out that I wasn’t just swallowing my pride and engaging my wife in a positive problem-solving exercise when I apologized to her on Valentine’s Day. We were acting with virtue to sustain the partnership marriage we have built over 24 years. 

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

—Viktor E. Frankl