

To Those Threatened By Divorce

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From: Mike McManus, President of Marriage Savers

Steps You Can Take To Save Your Marriage

Marriage Savers receives many requests for information by couples who want to save their marriages. Below is a summary of several strategies that have been proven to save most marriages. First, however, it might be helpful to those of you in pain to know some facts about marriage and divorce in America, and why it is worth fighting for your marriage. Your worst enemy at this stage is despair. Remember that your best ally is God Himself! As Malachi puts it, "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel." If you pray and take the practical steps outlined below, the Lord will help you restore your marriage.

Good News: Marriage is the Key to Happiness, Long Life, Wealth!

As Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher point out in their important book, *The Case For Marriage*, married people are healthier, happier, wealthier, live longer and have better sex than those who divorce or remain single. Oddly, this is news to our culture. Thus, secular evidence backs up Scripture. "The Lord God said, `It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Genesis 2:18). Selected data in brief:

- **Happiness:** Married people are twice as likely as those who are single for whatever reason to say they are "very happy." Some 40% of married couples say they are very happy, compared to 15% of the separated, 18% of the divorced. What's surprising is that only 22% of the never-married and cohabitators are very happy, the same as widows.
- **Life:** A married man at age 48 has an 88% chance of living till age 65, but a divorced man has only a 65% odds of survival! A woman aged 48 who is married has an 92% chance of living to age 65; but a divorced woman's odds are only 82%. Divorced men are twice as likely to suffer from heart attacks, cancer and four times as likely to be in automobile accidents or to commit suicide, reports J. J. Lynch in *The Broken Heart*.
- **Wealth:** Married men earn 10%-40% more than single men with similar education and job histories, according to "Why Marriage Matters." Married couples also accumulate more assets. According to *The Case for Marriage*, "On the verge of retirement (in 1994) the typical married couple had accumulated about \$410,000 (or \$205,000 per person) compared to about \$167,000 for the never-married, just under \$154,000 for the divorced, about \$151,000 for the widowed, and just under \$96,000 for the separated."
- **Sex:** "Married sex really is better sex," report Waite and Gallagher. "Married women are almost twice as likely as divorced or never-married women to have a sex life that (a) exists and (b) is extremely emotionally satisfying." Some 43 percent of married men had sex at least twice a week vs. only 26 percent of single men.

Marriage In America Is Disintegrating

Despite this good news, there has been an alarming disintegration of marriage in America:

- Divorces tripled from 1960 and 1979, rising from 390,000 to 1,181,000. By 2006, they declined only 8.8% to 1,076,000. There were 42 million divorces from 1970 to 2006 shattering the lives of 40 million children.
- A million children a year have seen their parents divorce since 1973
- The marriage rate fell 50% between 1970 and 2006. There are only 2.2 million marriages a year, when there should be 3.3 million, if the same percentage of couples were marrying today as in 1970. Why?
- Cohabitation skyrocketed 12-fold, from 430,000 in 1960 to 5.4 million living together in 2006. Cohabitation is the dominant way male-female unions are formed, not marriage.
- Cohabitation is a double cancer of marriage. The first cancer is that for millions, cohabitation is a substitute for marriage. A quarter of unmarried women aged 25-39 are currently living with a partner, and an additional quarter have done so in the past. Yet what many call a "trial marriage" should be called a "trial divorce." The only question is whether they break up before the wedding or afterward. Of 100 couples who begin living together 40 break up before a wedding, according to the University of Wisconsin. One result: the number of never-married couples has doubled from 21 million in 1970 to 52 million in 2005, diverting 31 million from getting married at all. The second cancer is that cohabitation before marriage increases a couple's odds of divorce by 50%. First marriages divorce at a 45% rate. So instead

of 45 of every 50 couples divorcing (22 couples), half again as many will do so (33 couples) – two-thirds will divorce. When added to the 45 couples who break up short of marriage, that's an abysmal failure rate of 78 out of 100 "trial marriages," as they are often called. Those who remarry after a failed marriage, have a 60% likelihood of divorce, whose odds are increased if they cohabit. Thus, only about a fifth of couples who begin cohabiting are still together after a decade!

- Children of divorce suffer more than anyone from divorce. They are twice as likely as children with an intact family to drop out of school, three times more likely to have a baby out of wedlock, six times more likely to be in poverty or to commit suicide, and 12 times more likely to be incarcerated. Further, as Judith Wallerstein's powerful book, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, makes clear the impact of divorce on kids "grows at least into the third decade." Based on interviews of 100 children of divorce over 25 years, she reports that "From the viewpoint of the children, and counter to what happens to their parents, divorce is a cumulative experience. Its impact increases over time and rises to a crescendo in adulthood. In adulthood it affects personality, the ability to trust, expectations about relationships and ability to cope with change... Anxiety leads many into making bad choices in relationships, giving up hastily when problems arise, or avoiding relationships altogether." Only 60 of 100 children married, and 33 were already divorced.

Options To Strengthen or Save Marriages

The type of intervention depends in part upon the stage of difficulty you are in.

- **Moderate Problems:** If the problems are poor communication and problem-solving, but where neither is considering divorce. We recommend Marriage Encounter, a weekend retreat that has been attended by 2.5 million couples, 80% of whom say it helped them to fall back in love, and to gain new respect for their spouse. A typical weekend is attended by about 20-30 couples at a weekend retreat at a motel led by three couples who tell intimate details of their marital growth. They then ask attendees to write to their spouse on an assigned subject, such as "What do I admire about you and our marriage?" "What feeling do I have that I find most difficult to share with you?" After writing, couples go to their motel room, read what each wrote and then talk. This part is utterly private. It is the exact opposite of sitting down with a therapist, and pouring your soul out to someone who doesn't know you at \$100+ an hour. To learn of a Marriage Encounter near you call 1-800-795-LOVE (795-5683), or United Marriage Encounter - 1-866-483-8889.
- **Severe Problems:** If divorce is being considered by one or both people. The best widespread answer is a program called Retrouvaille, a French word for Rediscovery, pronounced Ret-roo-vie. It is run like Marriage Encounter except that the leaders are couples whose own marriages nearly failed. These "back-from-the-brink" couples tell their own stories of recovery from adultery, alcoholism, etc. They then assign a topic for the couples to write on, and to discuss in private. Retrouvaille is so successful, it saves 80% of the worst marriages! More than 70,000 couples have gone and found the process inspirational. The couples leading the weekend are donating their time, as in Marriage Encounter. They are doing it for the most selfless of reasons. Their own marriage has been healed and they want to help others. To learn more, Call 800 470-2230. A couple leading the program will call and tell you when the next weekend near you will be held. Cost only a modest registration fee, but they do seek contributions by those who can afford it to pay for motel bills (about \$300-\$400). Those who can't afford the contribution do not pay.
- In trying to persuade a spouse to go to Retrouvaille, expect resistance. One person is always a "dragee." As long as they go, it makes no difference. Four out of five marriages are saved. Knowing this, Marriage Savers suggests the willing partner say something like this: "I know you are unhappy now. But a research report by the University of Chicago of couples who were so unhappy that one or the other of them considered divorce -- if they lived their vows "for better or worse," and stuck together, saved their marriages; five years later, 86% of the once unhappy marriages report their marriage is healthy and happy! Retrouvaille provides a concrete strategy to rebuild the trust at a much expanded rate, of giving hope to the hopeless. Thus, it's saving of four out of five marriages, is a reasonable gamble for building a marriage that is rewarding to both partners. (By contrast, therapists save less than 20% of troubled marriages according to Diane Sollee, director of Smart Marriages and former Associate Director of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy.)

Say, "We have been married x number of years. I am asking you to give me one weekend to work at our marriage at a Retrouvaille weekend. If we succeed, that would be wonderful for both us and the kids. If not, we have only lost a weekend. What is the risk?"

The problem with Retrouvaille is that it is held in most cities only two or three times a year. Go to www.retrouvaille.org and click on weekends to see one which may be held within driving distance, at an earlier time than one in your city.

- **Crisis Marriage Alternative:** While you are waiting to go to Retrouvaille or instead of going, Marriage Savers recommends another alternative: watch a DVD series, "Choosing Wisely...Before You Divorce," which saves more than half of marriages in crisis. It is a five-part series, best watched with a pastor, friend or mentoring couple who can help the couple talk through the issues. A Christian attorney in the first DVD says, "The worst thing you can do is to call an attorney. He will ask you to separate, stop talking to your spouse." He outlines the horror that divorcing couples go through legally. Other videos talk of the emotional and physical cost of divorce, and its impact on kids. Couples who actually separated or divorced outline what they did to reconcile. The package includes 5 45 minute DVD sections, two workbooks and a Leader's Guide. The videos can be ordered for \$65.50 by calling our offices, 301-469-5873, and can be paid for with a credit card. Pastors, therapists or Mentor Couples may prefer to order a Counselor's Edition with three sets of workbooks for \$102.
- **The Separated Couple:** If there has been a separation, or a separation is not far off the person left behind who is trying to save the marriage, can take a course called "Marriage 911" in which a woman would ask a female friend, or a male, a male friend, to meet with the spouse an hour a week for 12 weeks. There is a Workbook for the separated spouse, and a Support Partner's Manual so the friend knows what questions to ask each week. The cost for both is only \$28 plus shipping. One part of the course is to read a chapter of Proverbs daily. The course uses the time of separation for personal and spiritual growth and helps the person rebuild a trust in God. The odds are better than 50-50 that the person who has run off will come back, realizing that a mistake has been made. If the person left behind has remained faithful to the marital vows, not dated, and rebuilt a self-confidence and a faith in God, he or she will be more attractive than ever to the errant spouse. Reconciliation happens 50%-70%. If you want to order the Marriage 911 set, call us at 301-469-5873.

Must Reading:

1. For the person fearful of divorce, Marriage Savers recommends a book by Michele Weiner Davis: *The Divorce Remedy: The Proven 7-Step Program for Saving Your Marriage*. As Howard Markman, author of *Fighting For Your Marriage*, put it, "If you are thinking of divorce -- stop. Put the process on hold and read Michele's book. It will give you both the hope and the tools that you can use to not only save your marriage, but to have a great love relationship over a lifetime." I would add that her seven steps are practical, not obvious, and a proven strategy to reconstruct a deeply troubled marriage. Michelle Weiner-Davis outlines steps you can take to restore a marriage, even if your own partner is not interested in taking any steps. You can change the character of your marriage, by changing yourself.
2. A version of this book targeted at women, also by Michele Weiner-Davis, is called *Getting Through To the Man You Love: The No-Nonsense, No-Nagging Guide for Women*. This book is particularly helpful to women, who file two-thirds of all divorces. Here is a typical paragraph:

"By blaming your partner and not seeing your own role in your relationship dilemma, you might inadvertently be pushing his buttons and bringing out the worst in him. Also, you're so focused on his mistreatment of you, you start playing the blame game. You think he's to blame, so you wait for him to change. He thinks you're to blame, so he waits for you to change. In the meantime, nothing changes."

Michelle tells women how to take the initiative to end this stalemate. It empowers women to be marriage healers rather than marriage destroyers. Both of Ms. Davis' books are available in any good bookstore or on Amazon.com.
3. For those couples with children, you must read Dr. Judith Wallerstein's landmark book, cited above, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*. In following 100 children of divorce for 25 years, she discovered most of these children grew up in families "where they experienced multiple divorces and remarriages of one or both parents" plus "many cohabitations and brief love affairs," with cataclysmic consequences. Children sadly concluded that ties between men and women "can break capriciously without warning," which gives them no confidence in building relationships with the opposite sex. Consequently, they are terrified of conflict and tend to explode or run away." By ages 28-43, only 60% of these children of divorce had married and many of them had already divorced. After Dr. Wallerstein appeared on "Oprah" the book was on the best seller list.

4. If adultery has been part of your marriage, Dr. Stephen Judah has written an important book, *Staying Together: When an Affair Pulls You Apart*. When a marriage is threatened by infidelity, all parties involved can become desperate. We're tempted to look out only for ourselves, and the marital relationship is left hanging on for dear life. Judah explores both the phenomenon of infidelity, considering both the push of marital discord and the pull of sexual temptation. With a clear and helpful analysis of the relational science behind infidelity, he delivers a tested way back toward a meaningful marriage.
5. For the good news about marriage and its importance to every heterosexual person, I strongly recommend *A Case for Marriage* by Dr. Linda Waite of the University of Chicago and Maggie Gallagher, a syndicated columnist. It proves conclusively that those who are married are far happier, healthier, wealthier and live far longer than those who are alone. If you have any doubt about the value of fighting for your marriage, this book is must reading. It can be found in any good bookstore.
6. For the person in a stepfamily, with children from a previous marriage, read *Willing To Try Again* by Dick Dunn. He has also written a Manual and prepared a CD with step-by-step help on how to create a Stepfamily Support Group that can save 80% of marriages that usually divorce at a 70% rate. To order either item visit our Online Resources page or call us at 301-469-5873. The price of *Willing to Try Again* is \$12+ \$2 postage and *Developing a Stepfamily Ministry Kit* is \$38.
7. *Marriage Savers: Helping Your Friends and Family Avoid Divorce* is my major book which contains detail on each of the interventions outlined above. For example, Chapter 9 is about Marriage Encounter. Chapter 10 spotlights Retrouvaille and Chapter 11, Stepfamily Support Groups (among others). For those concerned about saving their marriage, the book will give you more information on these proven interventions and will help you to be persuasive to your spouse on why you should both go to Retrouvaille, for example. Chapter 2 offers detail on the consequences of divorce to both adults and children. The book also has three chapters for those who are not yet married, which make a case for chastity, for taking a premarital inventory and for being mentored by an older couple. It is an excellent book to give as a gift to a person you may be concerned about at a key stage of the marital life cycle. *Marriage Savers* also tells the story of how I began creating Community Marriage Policies® that are now in more than 200 cities and towns, which have brought down divorce rates in some of them by 50%.
8. George Gallup, the famous pollster wrote the Foreword, which begin with these eloquent words, "If a disease were to afflict the majority of a populace, spreading pain and dysfunction throughout all age groups, we would be frantically searching for reasons and solutions. Yet this particular scourge has become so endemic that it is virtually ignored."

The scourge is divorce, an oddly neglected topic in a nation that has the worst record of broken marriages in the entire world. Divorce is a "root problem" in our country, and is the cause of any number of other social ills.

Marriage Savers has an Appendix which lists the names, phones, and addresses of 24 marriage ministries which can help couples at every stage of marriage. And it contains an Index to make it easy to find any information about marriage or divorce that may be of interest. It can be ordered for \$15 + \$3 postage by calling my office during office hours, and I will send a signed copy, if you ask for one. The book is out of print, unavailable in bookstores, but I have copies. Call 301-469-5873.

9. *Insuring Marriage: 25 Proven Ways to Prevent Divorce* is my short book, a parable version of *Marriage Savers*. Chuck Colson wrote the Foreword. It is only 112 pages long with about 800 words on each of 25 answers on how the reader can become a "Marriage Saver," someone who can transform their church from being a "wedding factory," into a place that prepares people for a lifelong marriage, strengthens existing ones, or saves troubled marriages. Each chapter is brief, the length of a newspaper column, which some of them once were, that summarize the most important ways to prevent divorce. If you have a daughter who is cohabitating, or a brother whose marriage is in trouble, you might want to buy this slender book and tell them which chapter to read. Its cost is only \$6 + \$1 postage. Again, it can be ordered from 301 469-5873.

Finally, any multiple orders (3 or more) of either *Marriage Savers* or *Insuring Marriage* will be sold at a 20% discount. I am passing on my discount as an author in order to help fuel the marriage movement. You could, for example, teach a *Marriage Savers* course giving potential Mentor Couples in your church the option of buying either book. We have produced a series of 6 videos and a 96-page Leader's Guide to *Marriage Savers* to make teaching easy. For more information on this *Marriage Savers* Resource Collection, see the Resources section of this Web Site.