





# PRIMAL LOSS

*The Now-Adult Children of Divorce Speak*

EDITED BY  
LEILA MILLER

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primalloss@gmail.com

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To the 70 now-adult children of divorce  
who bared their hearts and souls for this project.  
I appreciate their courage more than they know.



To my dear friend Alishia Hanson,  
who was the catalyst and inspiration for this work.  
Until our friendship, I had no idea.



And to the Blessed Mother.  
She is true Mother to all the motherless,  
and comfort for every wounded child.



# Foreword

The Divorce Ideology is one of the linchpins of the Sexual Revolution. Kids are resilient. Parents who don't get along do their kids no favor by staying married. Everyone has a right to be happy, which means the right to change sex partners more or less at will. TV sitcoms, movies, academic studies, public policies, "style" sections of newspapers, women's magazines, therapists, and even some clergy claim divorce is harmless to children and beneficial to adults.

Unfortunately, these claims are false. Switching partners around can create chaos in the family. Divorce does not necessarily solve the problems people thought it would solve: The probability of divorce is higher for second marriages than for first marriages. Family law attorneys tell me that managing post-divorce conflict is a major portion of their business. And, most to the point of this book: Children do not just get over divorce.

"The kids will get over it." So say the experts and cheerleaders for divorce. On that basis, many parents end perfectly good marriages that could have been saved with some effort.

Sustaining the Divorce Ideology requires that people don't ask too many questions or voice too many objections. According to the Divorce Ideology, no-fault divorce just means that two adults who agree to divorce do not have to go through the elaborate charade of claiming that one party committed adultery.

In reality, many divorces take place against the will of one of the parties. The law takes sides with the party who wants the marriage the least, even if that person has committed adultery. That is how no-fault

divorce not only demolished the presumption that marriage is permanent—it also smashed the presumption that marriage is sexually exclusive.

In the Divorce Fantasy World, there are only two choices. Unhappy parents stay miserably married and fight for the rest of their lives, or they get divorced and everyone lives happily ever after. The idea that one or both parents should change their behavior doesn't register as an option, nor does the idea that the divorce might seriously wound the kids.

In the Divorce Fantasy World, the children are all better off if their parents split than if they stay together. The children are delighted that their parents are happy. They have no ill-feelings about being asked to move every other week, a fate that few adults would willingly endure. Children are okay with calling their mom's new husband "Dad," or seeing their own dad in bed with another woman. Children have no feelings at all about their family photos being taken down. They never feel jealous of the children of the new union, children who absorb the attention of their parent and new spouse. No, my goodness, no: The children from the original union never feel like leftovers from a previous relationship.

To keep the Fantasy alive, anyone who does not follow the Socially-Approved Divorce Script must be silenced. This is bad enough for abandoned spouses. But for children of divorce, it is a living nightmare.

The kids are socially invisible. If they have a problem, we take them to therapy. We put them on medication. But we never admit that maybe the adults should have worked as hard on their marriages as they seem to work on managing their divorce. And we certainly never tell the adults not to remarry.

Even inside the family, the children are not permitted to voice their real feelings. Love inside the family feels fragile: The kids have absorbed the message that people sometimes leave each other or get kicked out. They may view love as unreliable. Even if children could



verbalize their feelings (which they can't), they are afraid to risk losing their parents' love. They don't want to upset Mom or Dad.

They learn to silence themselves.

Leila Miller's book, *Primal Loss*, gives voice to the adult children of divorce. Their stories are not pretty. This book is significant precisely because it breaks through the layers and layers of pro-divorce propaganda that we all endure in 21st century America.

The cultural elites love the Sexual Revolution and actively promote the Divorce Ideology. They provide a platform for happily-divorced people, jolly blended families, and all the rest. They never mention the abandoned spouses or the shattered children. They need all this propaganda because that's what it takes to convince people that biological bonds don't matter either to children or adults.

Each parent is half of who the child is. When the parents reject each other, they are rejecting half of the child. They may tell the child, "We still love you; we just don't love each other." The child cannot make sense of this impossible contradiction. In my opinion, this is the underlying reason for the well-documented psychological, physiological, and spiritual risks that children of divorce face.

As a society, we are faced with two competing worldviews. The worldview of people of faith is this: Every child has identity rights and relational rights with respect to his or her parents. When children are deprived of these rights without an inescapable reason, this is an injustice to the child.

And these rights impose legitimate obligations on adults to provide these things to children. We don't like to say this too loudly, because people in our time resist hearing that they have obligations to others that they did not explicitly choose to bear.

The competing worldview is this: Every adult has a right to the sexual activity they want, with a minimum of inconvenience, and children must accept whatever the adults choose to give them. We do not just blurt out that last part because we would be ashamed of ourselves. But that is approximately the position of most of the people in power in most of the so-called developed countries: They believe it

is the job of the government to minimize the inconvenience that adults experience from their sex lives.

The Divorce Ideology needs the State because it needs enormous amounts of power to accomplish its impossible objectives. This one insight unlocks the key to the whole course of the Sexual Revolution. We can now see why enforcing divorce has become a power grab on the part of a whole array of businesses and professionals who could be called the Divorce Industrial Complex. We can see why the family-breakdown-is-harmless propaganda seems so relentless, and why the downhill slide into new, more devastating, and more permanent forms of family breakdown seems to be accelerating.

And we can see why silencing the victims and dissenters is essential to its success. Once people start asking questions, or raising objections, the whole fragile structure could come tumbling down.

Because of this systematic silencing of the victims, the next generation of children grows up operating under the very same illusions as their parents. No one ever gets a course-correction.

Leila Miller has done us all a great service by giving a voice to the children of divorce. Please read this book. Then share it with friends, family, counselors, teachers, and pastors. Break the silence. Do it for your own family, and for the families of future generations.

This suffering has gone on long enough.

Jennifer Roback Morse, Ph.D.

Founder and President, The Ruth Institute

May 2017

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# Introduction

“Do you really think they will care? Will anyone even want to read it?” My friend Alishia’s affect was flat, her tone vaguely cynical, but my heart broke to hear these words. Alishia, whose friendship and guardedly revealed pain inspired this book, simply could not imagine that her suffering and the sufferings of other children of divorce would be of interest to anyone “out there” who was not a member of their unhappy club.

“Yes, they absolutely will care. People from intact families have no idea. I had no idea myself until you started to tell me. Your stories are compelling, and it’s about time you all had a voice.”

She shrugged and changed the subject to something lighter, as many children of divorce are trained to do. Stuff, deflect, move along, tell a joke.

There aren’t a lot of jokes in this book, but there’s a lot you need to know. As I edited the words of these courageous men and women, I imagined readers pouring a glass of wine and grabbing a box of tissues before they settled in for an evening of heartrending stories. Before we go further, it’s important that you understand what this book is and is not.

## **What This Book Is Not**

This book is not a scholarly work. I am neither a scholar nor a researcher, and there is no “methodology” I employed in either composing the questions (they came off the top of my head) or finding

contributors (I just put the word out on my Facebook page, asking for volunteers). I do not for one minute pretend that what I'm giving you is any kind of social science, although I do include social science resources in the Appendix. I am not trying to provide answers—practical, therapeutic, or otherwise—for any situations or persons. I have none of that for you here.

### **What This Book Is**

This book is people telling stories, and that is all.

When I put out the word on my Facebook page many months ago, I had no idea that almost a hundred people would respond over the course of a couple of days. More came later, and while I distributed my little questionnaire to all who asked, many could not ultimately respond for emotional reasons such as this woman's: "It is a painful subject and I don't really want to dredge up those emotions and thoughts...I'm sure plenty of people are going to write things very similar to my own thoughts and experiences. I'll let them speak for me." And I do believe that the words herein will speak for many.

All I have to offer here is what I believe is rarely offered: The actual words of those most affected by divorce, but who almost never get to speak for themselves. You can evaluate their words for yourself and decide that theirs is the most underreported story of our time, or you can dismiss their stories as anecdotal and non-representative and go on about your life. My primary concern is giving a voice to those who have had none for so long.

This book is also a way to begin to right a wrong, a wrong to which most of us are oblivious: Children of divorce are not, as a rule, asked how *they* feel about their parents' divorce—not as a child and not in the decades that follow. Friends may ask them *when* or *why* their parents divorced, relatives may ask how the divorced parents are doing and feeling, and therapists may direct children on coping and communication skills—but, almost never does anyone ask the children, directly, how the divorce affected and still affects them.

Divorce researcher Elizabeth Marquardt has noted that “the divorce debate has long been conducted by adults, for adults, on behalf of the adult point of view,”<sup>1</sup> or as a now-adult child of divorce put it (on a Facebook thread where divorced commenters were defending their divorce choice and drowning out the feelings of the children of divorce), “I wish for once that those who are divorced/divorcing will be silent and just listen. I'm so tired of not feeling like I have a space to share because we have to be mindful—*yet again*—of the grown-ups' feelings.”

This book, then, is a chance for everyone else to be “silent,” and for the children of divorce to speak freely, without having to be “mindful of the grown-ups' feelings.” I am honored, humbled, and awed to be the editor of this collection of stories, and I consider my role in presenting them to you as a sacred trust.

## **Who Should Read This Book**

I think it's important to discuss the book's intended audiences, and what I hope each group will glean from it.

***This book is for adult children of divorce.*** I hope it will bring comfort and solidarity to all of you, as you begin to recognize, perhaps for the first time, that you are not alone in your pain. I now believe that most children of divorce suffer in silence, even for years and decades after the fact. That needs to stop. May the words of the contributors strengthen you and encourage you to find your own voice. Divorce is rooted in the sin of at least one adult, and as such is an injustice against children—who have a primal right to an intact home, safe with Mom and Dad. In the words of my good and faithful shepherd, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted, “You are not wrong in feeling this awful loss.”

***This book is for adults considering divorce.*** I pray that you will slam on the brakes and consider any other course than the one you are on. Reading the words of these children—words that could one day be spoken by your own children—should elicit a dramatic response in you,

a mental about-face that will save not just your marriage and your children, but, literally, generations of your family to come. If this doesn't do it, I don't know what will. To paraphrase one contributor: As a parent, you are surely willing to die for your children, but are you willing to live for them? Their lives, their futures, and their souls are in your hands.

***This book is for innocent, abandoned spouses who have been divorced against their will.*** My heart aches for you. This book is not meant to add to your profound pain and unnecessary guilt. You, too, are a victim of the evil of divorce. I pray you will find solace here, as each and every contributor in this book affirms and applauds your efforts to save your marriage, to fight for your family, and, in cases of true danger, to get yourself and your children to safety. They are grateful, and they do not blame you for decisions and actions that were beyond your control. What you read in these pages will strengthen your relationship with your children, and if you haven't talked about how the divorce has affected them, this is the time to start.

***This book is for divorced parents who initiated and/or defend their divorces as right and good.*** This book is not to beat you up, but to open your eyes and heart. The stories here are a chance to hear and understand your child, who may have never spoken these thoughts out loud to you, and you will learn why they haven't spoken—even your successful, seemingly well-adjusted children, even decades later. I pray that you will hear them. You may not even realize the chasm that lies between you, or that the quickest way to bridge that chasm is simply to listen to them and then to say "I'm sorry" from the heart—with *no excuses and no justifications*. Just a sincere apology. It will go such a long way. It will be balm for a child's soul. You have no idea.

***This book is for Catholic priests and therapists, and for any ministers or counselors who work with those in troubled marriages.*** I beg you, and the children of divorce beg you, save for extreme cases where there is no other possible choice or legal option, *do not counsel for divorce*. Even otherwise good and faithful Catholic priests and counselors—including



some to whom I have personally referred couples—have planted seeds of “divorce” and “annulment” in couples’ minds, even when the couples were looking for help to stay together, not an out. Yes, you are human, and you sympathize with those who suffer in unhappy marriages, but this almost reflexive default to divorce as a viable solution must end. Keep a copy of this book on your shelf, and loan it out to your parishioners and clients when needed.

*This book is for children of intact families.* This is my category, personally. I am a happily married woman whose parents have been married for 52 years. Divorce has not affected my life, and, until I began this project, I had no real recognition of the walking wounded all around me. I knew divorce was bad for children (there are few areas of social science where the evidence is as overwhelming and consistent), but I didn’t know or understand just *how* bad. Now I’m letting you know, so that you can never again sit by in silence when you hear about a friend’s decision to divorce. We can no longer be complicit. Also, we must never again take our parents’ intact marriages for granted. After you read this book, I don’t think you ever will again.

Finally, to all: I understand that this book may weigh heavily on the spirit, so please don’t leave it until you’ve visited Chapter Ten, where you will find beautiful stories of marital redemption—seemingly hopeless marriages brought back from the brink of divorce. They are a reminder that the future is not set. The end of your story has not arrived, whether you are a child of divorce, a divorced spouse, or on the brink of divorce. Our good and loving Father gave us the free will to write the ending to our story ourselves.

Next, a quick instruction on how to read the first eight chapters, and then we can jump to the heart of it...



# How to Read This Book

All 70 contributors received the same eight questions, and each of the next eight chapters begins with one of those questions, followed by contributors' answers to that specific question. Some of the 70 contributors answered all the questions and some chose to answer fewer, so you won't necessarily find answers from all 70 contributors in each chapter.

You will notice that the first chapter is long, because the answers to that broad question ("What effect has your parents' divorce had on you?") were the longest of any others.

My voice is purposely absent in the following eight chapters; I have simply let the contributors speak—with no outside commentary.

Each contributor has been assigned an identification number—from 1 to 70—and I have put that contributor's ID number in brackets at the end of his/her answer. For example, when you see this entry in Chapter Six, you will know that it was written by contributor #53:

Divorce doesn't just affect your immediate family. It's a curse on the next generations as well. That sounds dramatic, but all you have to do is look around to see that it's true. It sends out a ripple that touches many lives in very destructive ways. [53]

The contributor answers *are in no particular order*, and that is why the ID numbers fall randomly as you go through a chapter.

Also, there are line breaks between contributors' answers, so that's another way—in addition to the ID number—that you can see when one person's answer ends and the next person's answer begins.

## 8 How to Read This Book

If you want to keep the contributors straight or find basic information about any particular contributor (sex, age, marital status, age of the contributor at the time of his/her parents' divorce), you can refer to Chapter Nine ("Contributors") where brief demographic data is listed for each of the 70.

After the "Contributors" chapter, I have included another chapter of testimonies (Chapter Ten), this time from people who have stories of hope. Those stories do not come from the original 70 contributors, but from those who have turned their marriages around or have witnessed or encouraged a turnaround in others' marriages. The testimonies provide examples of how even the most disastrous marriages can come back from the brink and be healed.

Finally, for the Catholic Church's teaching on divorce, see Chapter Eleven.

Settle in, and let's get started...

## Chapter One

# The Effect of the Divorce

*“A very broad question, but what effect has your parents’ divorce had on you?”*

Devastation. I still don’t know why they divorced. I thought their marriage was perfect and that we had a perfect life. I don’t have anywhere to call home, and that has been a huge sadness all my life. Their 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary would have been November 4<sup>th</sup>, which I still mark on my calendar. They were married 26 years. [11]

Wow—so much to say about that. Where do I begin? The first time my dad walked out I can remember as though it were yesterday. My dad and I had an understanding that whenever my mom and I would have a big fight, I would pack up my little play suitcase and “run away from home” to the big tree at the end of the street (I wasn’t allowed to cross the street by myself at that age), and I would wait for him to come home from the hospital, and he would stop to pick me up and bring me home. Then one evening, he didn’t come. I waited until dark—and then I was too afraid to walk home—and my big brother came and got me and walked me home. I felt so abandoned

My dad, who had two more failed marriages, was left with a lot of regrets in his last days. If he had stayed with my mom, or even my first stepmom, then he would have experienced a very different life—surrounded by all the kids and grandbabies. The first five of us siblings

were once close. The latter three (we number eight in all) have no contact with the middle three. Their mother made it quite clear in the very beginning that she didn't give a damn about any of my dad's other children (she is only one year older than my big brother).

I always swore that I would never ever get divorced—and now I am. I feel so bad for my girls, who are now experiencing what I had to experience. That was the one thing I thought I could protect them from. Wrong, wrong, wrong.

I have become a cynic. [18]

My parents' divorce has made me struggle with the idea of marriage, wondering, "If they can't make it work, will I be able to get married and make it work?"—almost like I'm afraid it's genetic. [35]

A lot of brokenness in my family. I have three brothers and three sisters. They have gone through eight divorces and at least four abortions. No one, except me, is a practicing Catholic. Personally, I've had to battle depression and major insecurities in my life. I have struggled in my marriage, due to, I believe, the lack of male role models to look up to and learn from, regarding what it means to be masculine. [34]

Understand that the divorce was the final blow. What led up to it can't be discounted and yet cannot be compared in its devastation. The aftermath was equally devastating. It would take decades to recover and accept the healing and protection of God's mercy.

For me, the biggest effect would probably be my identity. It was *who I was*, however dysfunctional our family was at times. I was God's daughter, yes, and I knew that deep down—but I was a "Jones." I was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Jones! And I loved that. I was proud of that!

Then you have the loss of income. We went without heat for a while. My working mother used a kerosene heater and the oven to heat up our little house—no longer a home. I still recall how bitterly cold the

bathroom was in the morning before school. To this day, I abhor the cold.

Practically speaking, I began to run out of clothes. I had to get a job at 15. I had very few rules and little supervision. I had to put up with my mother's new lifestyle which included a live-in boyfriend whom I hated, and who would eventually hit on me and leave her anyway. My father moved to California to start over and eventually became a heroin addict. He pined for my mother until the end.

Truly, I was lost and insecure. I dealt with it by staying extremely busy with work, school, and partying. I had to pay rent when we moved to a neighboring city in 10th grade! I did not have the Church to lean on or any adult, really, to guide me fully into adulthood.

For a long, long time, I felt like a tree that was uprooted with its roots dangling above ground. I can even remember saying it out loud to people. I had deep-seated feelings of low self-worth and fell more deeply into a life of sin.

My mother remarried when I was 19 and hinted that I probably shouldn't come with them. My father was back in New Jersey on his way to Florida for work, and he let me take over his little apartment in a men's kind-of rehab building. Scary, but I also liked the independence and the boost to my self-esteem that it gave me. I had just enough money to survive, and my step-father would grieve this fact for many years. Not sure about Mom, since she keeps everything to herself mostly.

To the world and the liberal environment I was in, things probably seemed like they were going well for me. I had a decent job at the bank, and my own place at 19. But I was not okay, really. I sought security in my first boyfriend and married him shortly thereafter. I had a deep fear of abandonment. He left, not surprisingly, when my firstborn was eight months old. Things got better and then worse before I'd finally surrender and come back to the Faith.

Words that are, for me, synonymous with divorce: major upheaval, trauma, destabilization, departure, heartbreak, bad example.  
[20]

For me, the major effect it had was not having a father in my life. I searched for that in boyfriends and other males, which caused me to make poor decisions. My father was also an alcoholic, and there was physical and verbal abuse to my mother every day. I remember it as a small child, and I was the oldest of five children. [36]

This could be a never-ending answer. I am still finding out how this has affected me as I age and as my parents age. Coming from divorce is almost like coming from a different culture. I married a man whose parents were married 60+ years. They have passed away now, but how I deal with problems in our marriage is completely different than how my husband does. Trust, intimacy, confidence, self-respect—all of these are a constant challenge for me. I am not very good at problem-solving, and I think that's because I learned you just give up. I am very thick-skinned but extremely sensitive on the inside. I think that is because I learned how to ignore my feelings when I was a kid. I have never been able to be honest with my parents about how hurt I was at 11 years old to lose my mother. Just around the time a young girl needs her mother more than anything, my father kicked her out of the house and replaced her with his girlfriend/"wife" who was pregnant. I remember the day she went into labor. I was hoping something would happen...it did. My half-brother was born with severe cerebral palsy. He never spoke, walked, or talked. I lived my entire life thinking that was because of me. So much guilt, shame, and self-destructive behavior for the next 30 years, until my reversion back to the Church. God is indeed a good and merciful God. [64]

Yes, that question is broad. If I had to boil it down, I would say that the greatest effect would be on my own marriage and on my family dynamics now that I have my own family. I was raised by feminists (my mom and her sisters, and I suppose the culture as well) who instilled in me the idea that you must always be able to look after yourself. I took that to heart and was very outspoken (I shudder now at how



obnoxious I was), and I was also determined not to have to rely on anyone (read: a man!) to take care of me.

Then I fell in love. As it turns out, all the “strong woman” stuff didn't help me in marriage at all. My heart was guarded always, and what do you know? That's not really how you do marriage! In fact, I didn't know how to do marriage at all. How sad is it that when my husband was away on business, I was actually more at ease. I knew how to do the single-parent thing—that was a piece of cake for me; it was what I knew! My entire marriage has been very difficult for me.

Another aspect of the major long-term effect of the divorce is that my mother used me as her surrogate husband. I don't think she meant to, but she did. She shared her problems and worries with me, and we cried so many, many nights. That's how we'd fall asleep. I also had to fill the role of accompanying her to funerals, shows, work events, and things like that. My mother also had several hospitalizations that fell on my shoulders (by then I was a teenager), because I was the one who was there. And I always felt tremendous pressure to get her a really nice Christmas gift and a really nice birthday gift, because, if I didn't, there wouldn't be a special gift for her. After I got married, my husband wisely pointed out how much energy I spent trying to get her just the right present. It was over the top. As they say, the parents who quit on their marriage make the decision to put down their cross and leave it for their kids to pick up. I definitely agree with that.

The thing that occurs to very few when they are contemplating divorce is that it affects generations. Nobody imagines the baptism of their first grandchild as being a stressful, uncomfortable occasion, where ex-spouses will be reunited, each coming face-to-face with the person who more than likely represents the worst time in their lives. But that's what it so often is. All the joyful times—weddings, baptisms, birthdays, graduations—are tainted by the divorce; at least in my case they have been. My kids have seen that Nana and Granddad are kept separate; that Nana won't speak to Granddad; and that if one is invited, most likely they won't see the other. They've seen us juggle and split holidays when it would make so much more sense for everyone just to

gather together. They've seen uncles and aunts picking sides... even to this day. It is sad. [28]

One effect of divorce is that the child can become overly aware of his parents' feelings about the subject and bend over backwards to stay on the narrow, half-way line between his parents. Every word and action is measured in one's mind so as not to provide the slightest offense to either parent. One becomes a referee, at least in feeling. I still haven't entirely moved past this. [5]

Hmmm, the effect of their divorce. In short, it is decidedly inconvenient and makes life awkward when/if they visit, now separately. Maybe that's because the divorce came later in life and has created a situation so new. My children are confused, because divorce goes against everything we (my husband and I) teach them about love.

That's probably the polite answer. Really, it personally has affected my trust and hope in my parents. My hope was that they could actually learn and choose to discover how beautiful and fulfilling life can be by being honest, making conscious choices to care about other people, and ending their constant self-pity. My trust is affected because now I know too much, probably because my parents stopped regarding me as their child. Note to parents: Full disclosure is not always the best option. My prayer for my own children is that they can always come to me as my child for comfort and depend on me to be a parent. [56]

I never wanted my parents' divorce to affect me, and I actually hated using it as an excuse for a very long time. I wanted to be one of those kids/people who wasn't affected! I was going to grow up to be strong and awesome. And still, to this day, I get annoyed that it's even in my vernacular as a thing. It's not necessarily the divorce itself, but it's what the divorce resulted in—which, I suppose, in a sense, means it's the divorce. There was the heavy responsibility I felt for taking “care” of my mom and her feelings—at seven years old. I could not fully

understand, of course, that that's what I was doing, but basically it stunted my ability to properly form my own emotions.

From the world's perspective, my parents' divorce was "easy" and "put the kid first." What this means is that there was minimal fighting, straightforward custody arrangements, and compromising. My parents communicated about school, sports activities, and never discouraged the tough conversations with them if I needed to talk. I grew up having a good relationship with both of them; I went to college, established a great career, and have no substance abuse issues. From the outside, life is awesome! (And really, it is!) [9]

From a very early age, I worried about finding the "right" spouse, figuring out how to avoid the same mistakes, worrying that I wouldn't catch warning signs. I was always vigilant about discernment, but I wasn't sure what to look for exactly. I focused a lot on the opposite sex, dating even at a young age (middle school), and trying to figure out boys and men. I made a lot of mistakes along the way, buying into the secular idea of dating and marriage. It wasn't until I learned my Catholic faith in college that I understood the nature of marriage and how to identify a potentially good spouse. I couldn't quite rely on my parents to guide me on that.

My relationship with my dad was primarily over the phone, holidays, and weekends. We kids had to navigate his girlfriends, the ups and downs of his failing businesses, and instability (including his homelessness) for long stretches of time. We worried a lot about him and had a lot of anxiety. We felt responsible for his wellbeing, even though he pretended for our sake that everything was fine or going really well.

We experienced the constant disappointment of broken promises, building up and letting down. My dad was almost always very late in picking us up. There was always a work excuse. We would sit on the steps for hours waiting for him to come. He would take us house hunting, let us pick rooms and dream about a stable life, and then his business expectations would fail. We would often stay in hotels or at

his friends' houses. It dawned on me one day that he actually lived in his car and took us to a place with a bedroom when we visited.

My mom was a single mom, a nurse working nights, and we had a lot of babysitters. She would have loved to stay home with us, but that wasn't reality. We were quiet, anxious kids, but we had to go to preschool for scheduling reasons. We would have benefited from staying home. I know my mom wishes this had been different, and I know she did her best.

When my dad did finally remarry and buy a house, we did not have any space of our own. Our step-siblings had their own bedrooms, but we were always just visitors in his house. We had to call first and make arrangements. Dropping in without notice was not smiled upon. It wasn't our home. My stepmom claims to love us the same as her biological children, but actions speak louder than words. And we were not treated the same. To my dad's credit, he often gave us gifts and money to help out with life expenses, but he would tell us not to tell our stepmom. It was clear that she would not approve of this financial help from our dad when we were teens and college students. My stepmom seemed very possessive of their money after he paid for her graduate school, for the legal battles to gain custody of her kids, and for tens of thousands of dollars in therapy to help her kids. We've heard over and over again that we need to be okay with these sacrifices because they really need all his help. I don't doubt that they needed help, but I feel like we were asked to sacrifice a lot as kids when we really needed our dad to be there for us.

As a result of my childhood, I am almost never late for anything. I am very particular about making promises. Stability is very important to me, as is work/life balance. My husband and I have planned carefully and sacrificed greatly so that I can be home with my kids. I am very active in their education and very in tune with their personalities and needs. Parental presence, instruction, and stability were often missing in my childhood, and I want my kids to have what I did not have.

There is one more way that the divorce affected me: My dad had a string of steady girlfriends before he married my stepmom. Two of

those girlfriends had abortions while dating him. So we lost two half-siblings to abortion. My dad did not want the abortions, but as the father of these children, he had no say in it. Did divorce “cause” that? Yes and no. As my mom would say, *Oh, the tangled webs we weave...* [16]

My parents’ divorce has been pretty traumatic for me. I was 13 when my dad said he was leaving, and it was a huge shock, as we never thought that would happen to our family, especially after eight kids and over 25 years together—and after they had renewed their vows just a year before!

Although divorce was all around us in our extended family, we did not anticipate this happening to us at all. My family was involved in the Church and we all attended mass weekly. My dad was a physics teacher at the all-boys Catholic high school, and that allowed us kids to get discounts on our Catholic education. With so many of us, my dad also worked as a janitor at our parish. My mom was a lector, my siblings were ushers, and my brother and I were altar servers. My mom and dad loved to sing and joined the prestigious Fatima Choir that operated out of another local Catholic parish.

My siblings and I never imagined that our parents, who had been together so long, after having so many kids and with such involvement in the Church, would ever just throw it all away. I was 13 years old and in 7<sup>th</sup> grade when my dad told us he was leaving my mom. At first he just told us things were “not working out,” and he was going to move out of the home. I assumed he’d be nearby, and we’d still see him. I later found out that he was leaving her for another woman who lived in another state—a woman he is still with but never married—and that we would almost never see him after that.

We stayed in our big, old house in a bad neighborhood, a bunch of vulnerable sheep now without a shepherd. A few years later, we were victims of a home invasion by some neighborhood thugs. My mom and oldest brother were home at the time; the criminals held a gun to my mom’s head and beat my brother very badly, dislocating his jaw in two

places. We were, again, traumatized as a family. My mom, my little sister, and I ended up in an apartment across town, and the boys scattered to various apartments.

We kept going to church with our mom, but the divorce really changed how we saw God and life. Amazingly, despite being abandoned and depressed, my mom never lost her faith in God and remained very devoted to Jesus and Mary. I look back now at her life in complete admiration! She was an exemplary, saintly woman! But sadly, my faith, and that of most of my siblings, wavered tremendously.

My siblings and I all went through pagan, secular, hardly-believing-in-anything periods. In those years, we were hopeless, often aimless, depressed, and engaged in premarital sex. Some of my siblings have substance abuse problems, and others are on a multitude of prescription anti-depressants. I remember when I was in high school, someone from the Oprah Winfrey show called my mom and invited her to be on the show about families that break up after 25+ years of marriage (a cousin had given them her phone number). She politely declined and said she did not want to humiliate my dad on national TV. At the time, I was upset, because I was hoping for a free trip and a T-shirt or something, but I have later come to realize what an incredibly classy mom I had!

My oldest brother, who had been beaten by the thugs, later committed suicide. Within a year and a half, my mom was found dead in her apartment. She was only 57 and lived 12 years after the divorce—and I am certain that the trauma led to her early demise.

For many years after my dad moved away, I felt kind of like an “illegitimate” nobody. It felt as if all the 26 years he spent with my mom were, at least to him, a big mistake, a massive detour. I would often feel as if “I shouldn’t even exist.” But thankfully, our mom always told us we were wonderful gifts from God; that we were, in fact, meant to be. I really don’t know where any of us would be if we didn’t have that profound motherly love. As I have come back into the Church, I am often struck by her wisdom and see the logic in all the things she was

trying to do. I am so thankful to be alive, and I hope my story will help others who are going through things like this.

My dad is still alive, and one of my brothers (who has had difficulty keeping a job and has abused drugs) is living in his basement. I do think my dad feels some remorse over the whole thing, but he feels like there is no way to fix it at this point. His girlfriend has suffered a brain aneurysm and needs constant medical attention, which my dad provides. I don't talk to him much because it tends to make me feel bad. I'm sad we don't have a good relationship and that I might not see him much before he dies. I worry about his eternal soul. May God have mercy on us all! [54]

The effects of my parents' divorce on me:

A. I refuse to repeat their mistakes.

B. I am more sensitive to children of divorce as well as spouses who have been cheated on.

C. I was an extremely insecure teen and young adult because of my mom and stepdad's hypocritical approach to marriage and parenting. I have a very poor and dishonest relationship with them. [61]

I think it's almost an understatement to say that my parents' divorce (and the separation that preceded it) affects every aspect of my ability to understand family dynamics, familial love, romantic love, and the basic foundation of my faith. My parents' divorce was not simply a no-fault situation. It was a knock-down, drag-out fight to the metaphorical death of any vow they had promised 20 years prior, but in a civil courtroom using children to prove their legal points. Even my understanding of the basic dynamics of love relationships was challenged by the modeling and normalization of the severe dysfunction in which both of my parents engaged during the separation/divorce process. It created a gas-lighting effect that made my siblings and me unable to relate to each other or to our parents, and we were also unable to rely on our own understanding/perceptions of what had happened. We each seemed to develop a distinct "reality" that

didn't interlock with each others', despite having lived the same experiences. Sides were created where a single family narrative had once existed.

I consider my teen years almost entirely a wash as a result of my parents' antics in separation and divorce. My twenties were an incredibly painful, confusing, gut-wrenching decade, when I had to attempt to make sense of life, of adulthood, and of my childhood (in hindsight)—by myself. I entered my twenties with subjective logic, which divorce promotes, as my primer for adulthood. Instead of a naïve decade spent enjoying college and getting used to life's responsibilities at a normal pace, it was a tumultuous decade filled with uncertainty, over-correction, insecurities, self-esteem issues, misplaced trust, dysfunctional romantic relationships, physical and emotional overexertion, and a willingness to sin due to subjective justification. Divorce taught me that truth was subjective—that was the takeaway, and it did not serve me well in my teens or twenties.

I had to come face-to-face with all the ugliness of my parents' decisions, mistakes, dysfunction, and sins because I had been witness to so much of what led up to their civil divorce being finalized, including having parents try to call me as a witness in court proceedings—on my birthday. Talk about throwing the baby out with the bath water! Nothing was sacred to them in that epic battle, and so too did I learn that nothing was sacred in my own life by the same logic and example.

So many kids feel like a divorce is their fault, but I was actually told that my parents' divorce *was* my fault—repeatedly. As an adult, I realize this was a misguided attempt by one parent to find some healing from the pain that was caused by such a traumatic break. As that parent now lacked a spouse, I was the closest remaining vestige of his marriage—and he kept fighting his case, his side, his feelings, and his hurt, well after the civil battle was complete. In a divorce, a child becomes a mirror of his parents' dysfunction in marriage instead of being a representation of their love. This change is confusing and irreconcilable to the child, and dysfunctional on the part of the adult.



It took a lot of time, tears, and talking to God to figure out what happened from amid the rubble that was/is the family I was born into. At various times I've had to entirely remove a parent (or both) from my life, just to be able to make sense of things without dysfunctional influence. The constant discord puts a child, even an adult child, into defensive mode all the time. That defensive mode convinced me that I couldn't handle marriage and children myself, because by those rules and under those terms, it's completely untenable. For a decade after the divorce, I remained convinced that I was deficient in some way, unable to pursue a marriage vocation like those around me. My logic was, "If they are what I will become in 25 years, I don't want to gift this hell to another child."

Divorce creates its own language for a child. Much of it is unspoken, and the child is the only one who achieves fluency. It might be the voice of doubt in the back of my head one day, or the voice of indecision where I should be resolute another day. This perpetually dysfunctional language replaces the language of family love that otherwise forms a child's internal dialogue. So, in a way, divorce becomes the "everlasting gift" to the child that the child can't overcome. The dysfunction replaces the permanence and security of an intact family.

Imagine the family as an airplane in flight. You can do many things on a plane (including argue) and still get to your destination safe and intact. But divorce is a parent opening the emergency exit mid-flight, depressurizing the entire cabin, and jumping out while pulling the rip-cord on a parachute for only themselves... all while yelling that "you'll be *fiiiiiiiiine!*" A child can't make sense of why the parent did this; they are merely left with a crisis on a broken plane, without a way to navigate well or land safely and intact.

The broken family is a reminder that a parent had a choice. The child doesn't have a choice, though, and this is a perpetual source of confusion, pain, and complication where peace, joy, love, and simplicity should have been the norm.

Last, but certainly not least, my adult eyes see how loving, compassionate, and supportive my friends (and even strangers) are to their children. Even now, I wonder why I wasn't special enough to elicit the same love, compassion, or support from my own parents. It's always a question the child asks himself—"Why wasn't I enough?" It's more confusing as an adult, though, because I have the clarity that maturity and reason bring. I can clearly see that nothing could justify doing what my parents did to me. [69]

Early on, I felt very betrayed. Then I was upset that this is how she, as a Catholic woman active in our parish, chose to be a role model. I was deeply disappointed that she chose to have an affair and not to work on her marriage, so my whole view on "Catholic" women and what they learned at "women's groups" changed. [10]

The effects of my parents' divorce on me are difficult to fully ascertain since I cannot see myself from a truly objective standpoint. If I were to attempt to summarize, I would say that I lost my sense of "home" when my father left. Holidays like Christmas and Easter, which I used to anticipate with such joy and innocence, were now tainted with a sense of dread. No matter whom I was with, I always knew the other parent was feeling the weight of being excluded, and I blamed myself.

I lost my innocence when I took on both of my parents' burdens at far too young of an age. I tried so hard to be the strong one for the entire family, to the point that it nearly crushed me. I internalized everything and shared my pain with absolutely no one. In private, I cried myself to sleep, felt lonely, angry, abandoned—and even confused about the reasons for the divorce. This did not go away, ever. Even to this day, as I am married with three children of my own, I still struggle with this rupture.

I struggled most with making the commitment to marriage as an adult. I found myself in a series of truly wonderful long-term dating relationships with very good men who loved me for all the right

reasons and treated me with honor and respect. However, when the time naturally came for us to come together in marriage, I froze and found reasons to walk away from each of them. This happened multiple times, and I feel guilty even today when I think of the heartbreak I caused these people. The idea of being married brought a knot in my stomach. I never could explain it, since they were each stellar men whom I loved at the time. One of them even proposed to me, and I said yes for a brief time; however, I never found the peace, courage, or grace to really say yes in my heart to marriage. [65]

I wish I knew the actual effects, but it was pretty devastating. I remember being physically ill soon after, likely from the stress and shock of it. We had to move across the country to be with family, while my dad stayed with his new wife. My dad was so important to me that I took it very hard and actually had more anger toward my mother. I no longer had stability, and we moved around a lot until my mom remarried when I was in eighth grade. I was often sad, but I never, ever talked about my feelings or even understood my emotions. I'm not sure if it had anything to do with me becoming promiscuous starting in high school, constantly looking for love and affection. [60]

I'm so scared to share details, because, despite the *incredible* odds *against* this happening, I'm just sure that my mom or dad will read this book and immediately recognize which anonymous character is me. I am in an actual panic. That is the kind of reaction I have when I have even the slightest fear that they will find out how this has hurt me. I have been married for almost 15 years now, and I've known my husband well for 21 years. *Even he* didn't realize how much damage the divorce had done to me until he finally coaxed it out of me *within the past year*—and I still didn't tell him everything. All those losses—the divorce, the death of two stepfathers, another beloved stepfather jailed—just knocked me out. I couldn't get out of bed. I could barely go five minutes without crying. I would get in my car to go grocery shopping and take the long way home, staying away as long as possible,

fantasizing about skipping the grocery store and just driving and driving and never coming back. I daydreamed about slitting my wrists in the bathtub. The *only* thing that stopped me was realizing that my children would be scarred for life. I fiercely protect their well-being, and I could not do that to them. I started getting snippy with my husband. In a moment of weakness (or so I thought), he managed to coax out of me that I was distancing myself from him on purpose—because it would make it easier for me when he left me. He was shocked. Why would I think he'd leave? I reminded him of all the fathers that have come and gone. He's just next in line. A part of me still thinks that, even though he has constantly proven himself to be loyal and has also seen how detrimental a broken marriage can be. I still think things like, "That's it; this is going to be the time that I spend too much on groceries, and he's going to blow up and leave..."

I don't think people understand how guarded someone can become, especially someone who has been taught that love is conditional. If a child is thinking, "I wasn't good enough to make Daddy stay," *why on earth* would that same child admit, "Yeah, that divorce hurt me; I'm feeling inadequate and lonely"? Uh, no. Starting when I was eight years old (when my mom's second husband left), my self-esteem plummeted. I used to cover the mirror in my room with magazine pages so I couldn't look at myself. I thought I was hideous. I would use my fingernails to scratch my face because people kept thinking I was pretty, and I was trying to show them that I was not. When I was 11 or 12, I took a bottle of pills and hoped it would kill me. It didn't. I got terribly sick but woke up the next morning, alive and disappointed. In middle school, I started cutting my arms with razors. I have plenty of scars to prove that. I smoked, drank, smoked pot, skipped school, and slept around. If it weren't for my husband being an incredible pest and never giving up on me, despite all his friends telling him to give up on me, who knows where I'd be. He is the one who led me to the Church and to forgiveness.

In a nutshell, I have a hard time trusting in unconditional love from anyone: parents, husband, children, God. I feel like I can easily lose someone's love by messing up or having a personality flaw.

The idea of anyone realizing all this stuff about me is sickening. I have a good relationship with both of my parents and feel that if anyone knew all the pain I suffered, it would ruin that. I don't trust in unconditional love, and I am just positive that if my mom found out what I felt, she would be angry that I have not acknowledged *her* feelings or that I am blaming her for all of this. [29]

My parents' divorce has had a huge impact on me. The largest impact was that my father's protection was taken away when my mother left my father. I was a young and immature 13-year-old girl. There is something to be said about a father's protection, even a crappy father who isn't much available. There's something about hearing those heavy feet walk down the hallway. When I was 14, I became sexually active with adult men. I do not think this would have happened, at least to the degree that it did, had my parents remained married. When parents start up new relationships with new people, it offers a large amount of unsupervised time for the children of divorce. It creates an environment where the children are no longer prioritized, but the new romance is. No one much cares for the children of divorce who are left behind; the new guy or gal coming in wants the undivided attention of his or her new lover, and children are often "in the way" and treated as such—if not directly, then indirectly. [1]

This is a pretty big question. I'd say it has had a profound effect on me. Really, the constant threat of divorce under which I grew up as a child and the complete lack of love that my parents displayed for each other were far more emotionally impactful on me than the actual divorce. My parents are two wonderful people. It was evident from the moment my sister and I were born that we were the centers of their universe. We had every material comfort that an upper-middle-class family could provide, and we had every emotional comfort—minus

parents who showed love toward each other—that children could have. In every way other than being good spouses, my parents were excellent role models. My parents often fought with each other, and my sister and I lived with the constant specter of divorce (my parents used to threaten it often), and this is what really affected me. As a child, I was constantly scared that they would get divorced and that I would be the only one of my friends with the "shame" of divorced parents. I was also very scared that, should they divorce, my dad would move out, and I'd have to live with just my mom and my sister—my dad would no longer be there day-to-day to protect us.

The actual divorce doesn't so much bother me as it does irritate me; I resent that I will one day have to explain to my children why their grandparents don't live with each other, and I will have to explain the presence of "significant others." This really bothers me more than anything—the impact that my parents' divorce will have on my own children's lives.

Also, I'm a 39-year-old man, and I will never, ever be comfortable seeing my mom with another man or my dad with another woman. [12]

The effects have been lack of trust, lack of faith, lack of confidence, lack of self-worth, and a need for lots of male attention. [19]

Basically I still consider divorce an "option" whereas my husband, whose parents are still together, does not. It's a mindset that I still haven't managed to shake, and it's little wonder; after all, when I was growing up nothing was peaceful for very long and all notions of happiness were associated with things that happened outside the family and home. My studies, playing sports, traveling, etc., all took me away from the problems at home, and the residual effect of this is that I still fall into that way of thinking. Happiness lies "out there" and not within the home and most certainly not in marriage.

Before I continue, I want to say up front that I do not consider myself a victim. I do not blame my parents for my own marital

mistakes. Like them, I am a product of my environment, my upbringing, and society. My nature is fallen, and I am not impervious to temptation. I take full responsibility for the poor choices I've made as a spouse. The following confession is not to blame others, but to give a small sketch of what could and does happen when marriage is no longer a permanent thing.

First, I've filled out divorce papers many times—countless times, if I am being honest. One day when my eldest asked me what divorce meant, I realized that she had been rummaging through my side cabinet and found completed divorce papers that I never filed. I was filled with such shame and embarrassment that I couldn't answer her question. I now consider that moment as a gift to me; my aversion to the question gave me hope that perhaps, on some level, I do have a notion that marriage is forever and that my heart longs for it to be so.

I have driven to the local family courthouse with completed papers many times when I felt I could take being married no longer. It's what I witnessed as the solution, and so a solution it still seems. Sadly, I'm not sure I'm done making those trips or filling out those papers. I hope I am. I hope that we have turned a corner in our checkered marriage. But I worry. What if I screw up and hurt my children by leaving my husband? My greatest fear is repeating history and ironically, that pressure, I believe, often causes adult children of divorce like me to want to split quickly when things become hard. Even just threatening to divorce my husband, without the paperwork, is already a repetition of history. I've found that these sentiments rise and fall according to my menstrual cycle. This knowledge helps me prepare for it...but I don't know if anyone can *adequately* prepare for it. (This is where I make jokes about stocking the beer in the fridge once a month.)

There are other, more subtle ways that I see the effects of my parents' divorce on my psyche. Frequently my way of dealing with marital problems is to withdraw, physically and emotionally, from my spouse, instead of working things out. The main reason I do this is that it's difficult for me to actually know how to work things out in marriage, how to reconcile amicably, how to argue productively. I've

never really seen it done. I know there are ways of learning what words to say/avoid during a tiff. In my case, though, I feel like I literally need a script. I know it sounds silly, but if only there was a way for those of us from broken homes to rehearse disagreements with our spouses it would be incredibly helpful.

My husband and I attended a retreat several years ago that gave us some communication techniques we lacked, but we quickly learned that no one method fixes it all when it comes to communication and marital challenges. You change, your marriage changes, and you have to adapt to new modes of being all of the time—sometimes I'm pregnant, sometimes he's away for a week for work. Staying wedded is already exhausting if you're lucky enough to have had a healthy example doing so; it's nearly impossible if you haven't.

In my case, I witnessed violence, anger, screaming, objects flying through the air, and cops being called to settle domestic disputes. Guess what mistakes I've made during my marriage?

There are days, to my great shame, when I can hardly bear to acknowledge the ignominy of my actions. I confess them here only so that others who have felt hopeless—who perhaps suffer with mental illness, regret, and who feel entirely alone in trying to make their marriage work—might take hope from my testimony. I am still married. I love my husband and am confident in his love for me. That fact alone stands as perhaps the greatest difference between my marriage and my parents' marriage: Neither one of my parents really had a deep love and respect for the other, and the only reason they married is sitting here writing this essay.

Genuinely being in love helps. It does. But divorce, for someone like me, is still a temptation. It's an out. It feeds into the mentality that I mentioned at the beginning of this question, that happiness is "out there." More than a worldview, I consider it an addiction always to be fantasizing about starting a new life. It functions the same as addiction, anyway, by numbing you to the present, immediate circumstances around you, which you simply cannot bear. Of course you can't. You've



never learned how to bear it. You don't know anyone who has. Your parents couldn't, so how are you supposed to? [13]

My parents' divorce was devastating. I felt like my foundation and sense of safety was destroyed. It was made worse by the fact that I felt powerless to protect my own children from the fallout. How could I explain it to them? What would happen in the future? My husband already came from a fatherless, broken home, and our last example of normalcy and stability was blown to bits. [53]

I was grateful they divorced, because their marriage was miserable, and as the eldest child, I knew what was happening. However, the issues they had between them affected my sister and me quite a bit. We ended up with all sorts of relationship issues with men because of this. My father was physically abusive, and my mother was verbally abusive. It was such a toxic environment that I was glad to remove at least one toxic parent. My preference would have been for them to fix their problems (both personal and marital) and to stay together. I've always longed for a strong family unit and have mourned that loss. [17]

When my parents first separated, I was really upset because my now-husband and I had just announced our engagement. It made all family situations awkward, starting with our wedding seven months later. It has been something that my children have struggled to understand, because until a few years ago, all of the married couples on my husband's side of the family were still together.

Just this week, after 17 years of my parents' separation, I have found myself extremely sad and missing the way that Christmases used to be, with my parents still together and my grandparents still living. My kids don't seem to have the same joy for Christmas events that I grew up with, and I wish that things could be like they were back before all of the changes.

I am saddened by the role that I have played in the distance between the generations in my family, because the awkwardness of my

family's separation has made me want to stay away from all of that during the holidays and make our own holiday traditions. We have done that, and for the most part I think that is good, but I also think that without being able to celebrate with extended family, something has been lost for my children. They will never have the same kind of times with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins that my husband and I had growing up. Our close friends here are like family for us, but it's just not the same.

Incidentally, divorce on my husband's side of the family has now caused alienation there as well, and my immediate family has also suffered from that separation; we have almost completely lost contact with one brother-in-law, who is the godfather to one of our sons and was my husband's college roommate. [7]

I was devastated as a child when my dad drove away, and I will never forget standing in our front yard literally screaming, "Come back!" I didn't understand what was happening, and my three-year-old sister certainly didn't understand. I remember my grandma (my mom's mom) grabbing me, telling me he loved other women and to stop screaming. It was very rough those first years, and then you move on. You basically have to, or your life just stays bitter. Both my parents remarried—my dad a couple years later, and my mom when I was 13. My dad is still married to my stepmom whom I adore, and my mom divorced my stepdad when I was 22. He was a true jerk, so I was glad when my mom divorced him. I would honestly say I "survived" the divorce, but the fall-out wasn't pretty: Lots of acting out and "unsettled" behavior. It really skewed the way I looked at guys and what I thought "love" was. If marriage wasn't forever, why should anything else be? [41]

I believe it's had an extreme effect on me. I spent my childhood from, I'd say, age six to about age 17 talking bad about each parent to the other parent just to make that parent show me attention and "love." For example, I remember telling my mom something having to do

with my dad (she was trying to catch him in a lie), and she got very upset because it wasn't the "truth" she was looking for; she kept telling me to stop lying, so I finally lied to make her happy. She then confronted him and used me as a witness. I was six. I still feel sick when I think back on it.

I spent my teen years trying to get their attention, especially my dad's. That meant smoking, then drugs, then eventually getting mixed up with an abusive guy who talked me into leaving my home. I was 17 and he was 26. I ended up pregnant, far from home, and it's a miracle I made it out alive.

I also believe my parents' divorce had a good effect on me, too. Once I realized that the child growing inside me was in danger, I refused to live a life of abuse. I had the strength to leave my "boyfriend," go back to my hometown, and do it all on my own. God had other plans, of course, as He later gave me my wonderful husband! We went on to have seven more children, and then we were crazy enough to adopt four more from my aunt. I believe that had I not gone through the heartache I did with my parents' divorce, I would not have the wisdom to see what a marriage should be, nor the strength to make it through. [6]

Frankly, I wonder if my father would be alive if my parents had not divorced. There was a time when I was very angry at my mother about his death, but I have come to believe that's unfair to her. I would say also that a permanent happy marriage seems like a dream to me. [51]

I watched my parents treat each other badly for as long as I can remember. I don't ever remember them being really loving and kind to one another.

My father was an only child whose father and mother split when he was three years old. He grew up as the only Irish kid in an Italian Bronx neighborhood, and I believe he had a lot of issues from both being raised by a single mother and grandmother, and by being

different from other kids. He took a lot of that out on us, especially my mom, and I could hear terrible things being said as I sat in my bedroom behind closed doors while they thought my brothers and I were asleep.

My mother was raised in a loving family with great parents who were my role models on overcoming and making it through difficulties in marriage. We grew up listening to horrible things my grandparents had gone through and witnessing the love and laughter they had for each other. They were inspirational, but they also valued boys over girls, and I think my mom was always a bit lost. I found something of hers one time that made me think she had once been in love with another man (before she was married). This shocked me, and I began to see her as she had been before marriage when she was young and pretty. It hurt to know she thought she couldn't do "any better" or wasn't good enough for this other man. Again, I'm not sure I'm saying this right.... It makes me sad.

It also makes me see how I picked up her traits, and how my feelings of inadequacy and better-take-what-you-can-because-you'll-never-get-any-better come from. Both my parents looked for superficial traits in marriage, and so did I. It never occurred to me to look for someone who was faithful, gentle, and kind, and who put God and family first. I guess I thought that would either come over time or was more the woman's responsibility.

My mother hoarded things; our house was always a mess and we never felt comfortable bringing friends home. This drove my father crazy (understandably), and I think my mom used it as a way to get back at him.

I watched my grandparents and their loving marriage and never believed I'd be divorced, but divorce was so forever-looming over our heads as children that I did mention the word to my husband a few times when things went badly. I'd say to him that we were headed toward divorce. I thought I was facing facts. Now, after hearing people say you should never bring up the word "divorce" in a marriage, I wonder if even doing so was wrong. My husband also grew up in a

divorced household. For him, divorce seemed to be accepted and expected.

When my father got remarried, my brothers and I went to the ceremony. We tried to be supportive. I never really understood my parents as a couple, but I didn't agree with this new wife either. My father announced his divorce and wedding at the same time I was getting engaged and beginning to make plans for my marriage. My parents pretty much kept me out of their divorce, but I know that my mom lost years of income and that my dad controlled money and put her down. I know, even from watching divorce from a distance, that divorce doesn't end strife between most couples.

More than anything, I wish I'd had someone talk to me about what to look for in a man and encourage me to be patient in finding someone.

My parents were married May 3<sup>rd</sup>. I still feel sad on this day. [14]

Primarily, I have always, always wanted to get married to my one, true love. Let me be clear: I came out of a very violent and dangerous home with our dad. My mother is lucky even to be alive after my father abused her for probably their entire five years together—sexually, physically, and mentally. It is a miracle that she was able to get him out of the house without him killing her or all of us. For that—for her ability to leave and get away when and how she could—I am eternally grateful to her and to God.

My mother also, by the grace of God, had the courage to give birth to me at the young age of fifteen—even after being told to “get rid of the baby” by several people, including the local priest, she claims. I believe I owe my very life to my paternal grandmother; may she rest in peace. My mother was abused and kicked out of her home when she told her own mother she was pregnant. My father's family took her in and kept her safe from her family, took care of her, and made her stay in school. Looking back on my mother's incredible story, I am so grateful for her. She always kept us safe, and we were number one for her. [68]

I was unable to trust for many years. I was very upset and bitter toward both parents. While I had high expectations for the man I would marry, the divorce made me feel hopeless when it came to my expectations for a lifelong marriage. The divorce has had a financial effect on me and my siblings; our family is now spread out much farther, and we have additional households to visit—especially around the holidays. This makes things more stressful. I also worry about the “normalcy” of divorce and how much of it is in my family and extended family as well. [49]

I have had trouble with friendships and in relationships. I despise dishonesty and think that candor is the best way to confront it, which doesn't work out particularly well. I've only ever had one boyfriend (more of a fling) in high school before my “re-conversion” moment. That “re-conversion” moment showed me how much anger I harbored for my father and how that affected my relationship with God the Father.

In terms of relationships, on my list of “must-haves” is a man who is Catholic. My father, not being Catholic or religious at all, makes me think that mixed marriages can't work out. I know some amazing guys who in any other world I'd like to date, but, because they aren't Catholic, I just can't.

For friendships, it takes me a while to get really close with people, and then my worst fear is losing those people to whom I bared my soul. Within the last year I have had that happen, and it reconfirms my fear that nothing can last forever.

In a large Catholic culture at school, I'm almost constantly reminded that I'm different. My parents aren't together, I don't have five siblings, and I didn't grow up reading about saints and praying together as a family on a regular basis. Of course, I know people aren't as perfect as they seem, but, from the outside looking in, I'm pretty different.

I love my parents. Financially, my dad has provided everything for me, paying for my education at a private Catholic university so that I

don't have student loans. My mom gave me the greatest gift of instilling the Catholic faith in me and showing me perseverance even in the face of trial. I don't strictly "love" my stepmom, but I don't hate her.

I don't know what I want this book to say. I don't know if I'll even read it. I prefer not to dwell on the divorce too much. It brings me down. There isn't anyone whose story is like mine that I can relate to, except maybe my brother, but he's a little older than me, so his experience could be completely different from my own. I am glad to be anonymous, as I don't want my parents to see what I really know or think, in case they are hurt by what I say.

My parents' divorce is not me; it does not define me. [37]

My parents' divorce has led to a very basic and fundamental lack of trust in people. I emotionally shut down at age eight, as a defense mechanism. This has continued into adulthood. [32]

I believe it instilled a fear of abandonment in me with regard to *all* of my relationships. I developed problems trusting in people to be there for me, believing that when the going got rough, people would leave me. I never learned any skills for solving conflict in relationships. As much as I desperately craved intimacy and love, the closer someone came to me, the more terrified I was of getting hurt, or worse—abandoned. I unconsciously sabotaged relationships, as I didn't know how to receive and accept real love. In the end, I would ultimately find a way to escape or sabotage the relationship to avoid the pain. It was a no-win situation for me. [63]

Thank you for anonymity; I don't want anyone to know the extent of how damaged I am.

I remember my dad carrying me down the stairs, and I was crying and telling him I didn't want him and my mom to get a divorce. I was little. He said not to worry.

Next memory...I walk into the house and see two empty chairs looking at each other. It is a searing memory in my brain. They must have been sitting there fighting...now they are empty.

Next memory...I am 12 and lying on my bed. I was just told my parents are getting divorced—told to me by my dad, and then I am sent to school. *Can you imagine?!!!* I am an only child. I really have nobody.

My mother is distant and very unloving. She grew up with a horrible mother. My father is my everything. He is good to me. I am now living in an apartment. I am alone. So, so alone. My mother is a full-time nurse. I was a farm girl living next to family...my grandma. Now I am in town. No family. Just alone with my messed-up mother. No one to love me. My dad remarries when I am 15.

Next memory...I am sitting in a chair asking my dad for some time...just me and him. I only see him on weekends, and now his new wife and newly adopted five-year-old have all his time. I just wanted a little time with just him. I am told no. My whole self in an instant was gone. The hole that was created by being rejected by my father was something that continues today. He chose his new wife and daughter. I went back early to my mom's and when I walked in she said, "Why are you back so early?"...not in a "so glad you are home" welcoming way...but in a mean way. What the hell is wrong with these people, Leila?? They were 39 and 41 years old!! Not stupid teens or young twenties!

Well...because of that, it opened a hole so big, so wide, and so painful that I started filling it with food. Hello, adults...Look who just gained 40 pounds, and why is she dating the worst boy in school? Why did she just sleep with someone? Why is she drinking so much? Why are her grades so bad?

Why did my parents never go to my sporting events? Why did my dad not want me? Why did my mom leave for California when I graduated from high school? Why did I sit on my apartment floor and cry and cry and cry...Why is there so much pain? *Why do they get to go on and live happily and leave me in pain?!!!* No family to go home to. My family is broken. I accept this new situation, I live and pretend as if



everything is okay, but everything is wrong. Why is it Christmas Day and I am with no parents? My dad is at his new wife's side, and my mom is gone. I have no family. So alone. So broken.

I always wondered why there was so much pain. I still don't know why my parents' divorce affected me so much. It's not like I lived in a war-torn country, or had been raped, etc....I still can't understand why it hurt so much. I think it was more of being abandoned by parents...They were not good parents. Maybe it would have been different had they been involved. Because of the divorce, I went down that bad path. My parents were married 15 years before my mom walked out.

What is life like now? I just pretend everything is good for the sake of my children. It never goes away, though. Ever make a family tree project in school? Oh, look...broken. My mom's parents were also divorced. It is just horrible, Leila. Just horrible. Thanks for doing this. Please continue to advocate for this. Hopefully this book will keep even one family from divorcing..for one child..it will be good. [31]

My mom divorced my dad. Throughout the years, she had been the nucleus of the family. She kept everyone going, including my dad who, after retiring from the Navy, took a backseat. He is an unemotional person and it was my mom who kept him with a purpose within the family. When she left him, she decided she didn't want to do Sunday dinners anymore, and she didn't want to be the one planning holidays and celebrations. She checked out of that role, and we had to just deal with it. The safe place and feeling of being at your parents'/grandparents' house was gone. Thank God I had the Church, because from there I drew comfort and safety; I no longer had it with my parents. [38]

When my parents got divorced, it was embarrassing. As a child, I never had friends come over; I was ashamed that my parents weren't together, and that we weren't a "nice" family. My parents argued when they were married, but there was no abuse. I think they were both

selfish. They both talked badly about each other to us girls, but we still loved them. Fast forward to my teen years—I became pregnant, and my boyfriend (now husband) and I had very little support. We decided we had to be tough, and we fought hard to make our little family work. We had the baby and got married. It was hard, very hard. My mom would encourage me to leave my husband, telling me it wasn't going to work. We live in such a “throwaway” society—people and things are disposable. [27]

Not an easy question. As I examine my life, I recognize that many forces helped to form it, and it's hard to determine which influences are responsible for each aspect. There were a lot of unhealthy behaviors at play in my parents' marriage and subsequent divorce, and they all had an impact.

By the time we moved to a different state when I was 10, I knew my parents had serious disagreements; however, the thought of divorce hadn't occurred to me. The only hint of that was when my aunt told me that if we moved my parents would “break up”—and that I needed to prevent that. My father was unfaithful throughout the marriage, but I didn't know that until after we moved. Ultimately, my mother and now stepfather had an affair, which I think provided the impetus for my mother to file for divorce.

My parents thought I was handling the divorce well, but in many ways they were oblivious. By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I was chronically depressed. I would fight my mom about getting up in the mornings, and after my bath I would wrap myself up in my towel and fall back asleep on the bath mat. As I was never a disciplined student, my grades got worse, and I ultimately dropped out of high school. By the summer after 9<sup>th</sup> grade, I was sneaking out at night, hanging out on the local university campus, and going to see the *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* regularly. I never drank until I was older, but I did smoke pot regularly and experimented with other drugs. It is by the grace of God that alcohol and drugs never became a big issue. My stepsister was not so lucky, and she spent time in alcohol treatment as a teen; I believe she continues to

struggle on that front. The depression continued, and after getting my GED, I slept through two semesters at the university, earning failing grades across the board.

Starting from my aunt's comment when I was nine, and compounded by my own personality, I have spent most of my life "handling" my parents and their relationships with each other and others. I have been my mother's friend and confidante, learning and dealing with adult topics much earlier than appropriate. My father similarly introduced far too many adult topics, as I was exposed to his far less monogamous lifestyle. Both of them wanted my friendship and approval, and they both needed different things. I compartmentalized my personality, exposing to each parent only the sides most likely to gain their approval. I was well aware that my mother particularly disliked aspects of my personality that reminded her of my father. My father was less judgmental, but his mother was not. I went from favored eldest grandchild to the one who was far too much like "that" woman.

Because of this compartmentalization, done mostly subconsciously as a child, I have a very hard time figuring out and accepting who I am. I still tend to try and be the person a given situation demands. I struggle with boundaries, and I tend to lose myself in the needs of others. Only now that I am in my 50s am I starting to understand things about myself that I suspect others learn in their 20s. The compartmentalization had another important impact: It made me assume that part of me was bad. I was never sure if the part my mother disliked was the bad part, or if the part my paternal grandmother disliked was the fatal flaw, but I knew that I was unacceptable as a whole. [67]

As a kid I was always sad and always trying to keep everyone else happy. I felt like I had to be one person when I was with my dad and another when I was with my mom. [50]

My parents' separation has been very confusing for me, and has, quite honestly, caused a lot of pain. I didn't think so much about it when it happened, but now, when I do think about it, it hurts. It pains me to think about them being alone when my sister and I aren't around, especially on the holidays. It's hard to figure out how to split up the holidays and not feel guilty. I never understood how people could feel guilty for their parents' divorces, but I do now. I think about what I could've done to help them talk through things or work out their arguments, since I was old enough to know what was going on. I think about how I shouldn't have wished for them to split up when they had a particularly bad fight.

It pains me to see them together and know that they still love each other, at least a little bit, but know that nothing I could do or say would ever bring them back together. I see them together, and it makes me miss having a whole family. In my opinion, divorce is a loss, almost like losing a family member to death, because you are losing having your family whole. But I don't think society sees it that way, and children and teens aren't really given an opportunity to grieve the loss of that close-knit family.

I wasn't given a chance to grieve until I ended up in the hospital a few years ago—a week-long stay for depression that I suffered due to the loss of my family being whole, among other things. Besides all of that, there's also a fair amount of confusion, since I don't know what the Church teaches about separations. I don't know if it's a mortal sin for them to be separated, which makes me concerned for their souls. So, as you can see, there's a lot of pain and confusion, and not much I can do about it. [22]

These are some of the effects of my parents' divorce on me: PTSD; constant fear of rejection; constant need of acceptance; constant desire for a "replacement" family; and a great need for a mother figure, because in my personal circumstance, my mother might as well not have been there—at least not in the way that a person needs a mother. [45]

I think the first thing it taught me was to not trust anyone. I expected my parents to be there for me, and they weren't. But there were many issues. My parents were raging alcoholics. They didn't just drink, they made excessive look like a starting point. I knew my parents' relationship was always on rocky ground because they argued a lot, but I never knew there was a departure imminent. I don't think my mother knew either. One day my dad came home from an AA meeting (or at least that's where he said he was) and told my mom he was moving out—that day. He took his things, along with half of the living room furniture, and moved out. Three weeks later, my mother left a note on the door saying she had moved to my grandmother's house, 70 miles away, and, if I wanted to come there, to call and they would come get me. I ended up going to my father's house, where his girlfriend had moved in with him.

But let me return to the question at hand—the divorce has affected probably every aspect of my life. Divorce, like sin, has twisted my view of the world. And without the foundation of the Church's teaching, I operated with the belief that divorce was not only a possible outcome, but a likely one. [52]

When my mother died, I was surprised to find myself thinking, "Wow. I guess they really never will get back together." I was 24 at the time. My parents had been divorced since 1977, and it was 1992. I had actually harbored the thought that one day they would come to realize that they loved each other and would get back together.

In 2006, I tracked down the judge who signed my parents' divorce decree in 1977. My mother had told me that Judge McCann had called them to the bench before signing the final order and asked, somewhat sadly, if anything could be done to save the marriage. Apparently, with no affirmative answer, he signed the order. Years later, I used the channels I knew as a lawyer to track down the judge, who had long since retired. As a grown man of 38, I was on the phone sobbing—and I do mean sobbing—recounting the story to Judge McCann. I told him that my mother's story had stuck with me, because I think he may have

been the only adult who actually gave a whit about my parents' marriage in 1977.

As a little kid, I did not understand the concept of being "unmarried." I still don't. To me, it's all pretend. If you marry and you have kids, that's it. You can't be "unglued." And of course, that's what the Church teaches: Any consummated marriage, validly entered, is indissoluble.

I grew up very conscious of when I was in homes where there was a father. It was strange. It was something of which I was very envious. Very envious.

My father was a spectacularly wealthy man—private jets, opulent residences and vacation homes, starred in his own commercials for his brokerage firm during the Super Bowl in the '80s, and entertained George H.W. Bush at his home (what used to be my home) in 1984. He had a private audience with Pope John Paul II and has entertained bishops and cardinals and politicians of every stripe. He'd been a guest of Ronald Reagan and had buildings named after him, although some were renamed after his criminal conviction—you get the picture. He even has his own Wikipedia entry...ending with his release from prison. But ultimately, his life has been a failure, and that's how I view him. None of that wealth did a damn thing for my family, except get in the way. I don't really care about the criminal conviction. I know lots of guys who have gone to jail, and they are among the best men I know. I care about what he did to our family and the home-wrecker he let in. I miss my mother sometimes. I grieve over the loss of relationships with my brothers and the destruction of the Faith in our home.

One thing I absolutely hated (and my brothers didn't like it either), was packing up on Fridays and schlepping over to my father's house, which had formerly been our house. It was worse after he remarried and moved her in, along with all her kids from a prior marriage. My own kids come home from school on Friday, I get home from work, and we all eat pizza and start a weekend of general relaxation, prayer, recovery, and preparation. Not so in my childhood. The mental preparations for weekends at Dad's were stressful. The visits

themselves were stressful, and he was frequently absent, dumping us with whomever was around and then dragging us to dinner.

There is a deep wound, never fully healed, on my psyche. I know it has its origins in my parents' divorce and some of the sequelae that followed. The divorce was devastating. The loss of two parents together in what I thought was a happy home was horrible. My father's remarriage made it worse, feeling as though I was replaced—which basically I was, as were my brothers and mother. Being sent to boarding school as a teenager by my mother further ripped my guts out, and it crushed me. It really did. I wish I'd had my father's protection then, but he was out of the picture and with his new family, and it was worse with him around than without him. I still have a distinct memory from boarding school, walking back to the dorm one afternoon. I said to myself, "From now on, I have to be myself, by myself." I was 15.

My father's twisted relationship with the Church prejudiced me against Catholicism for a long time. In my view, there were some kind and "simpleton" Catholics I knew, but the rest were hypocrites. It turned out that the two "simpleton" families I knew ultimately had a profound effect on me and my being confirmed on Pentecost Sunday 1994 at the age of 25—with 50 eighth graders.

I truly, truly despise divorce lawyers. When I am introduced to someone who tells me they are a "family lawyer," I tell them, no, you are an "anti-family lawyer." I do not do divorces. Neither does my wife. I could have made a small fortune doing them, and I know one Catholic who has. He is in charge of the Pre-Cana program at a neighboring parish. He once introduced me as a colleague, and I made sure everyone in the room knew that we were not colleagues...that he was a "divorce lawyer," and I was a lawyer.

Ultimately, I believe in God's mercy for everyone, including those who have hurt me tremendously, as well as for myself, as I have done substantial damage in my own life. I believe in the infinite merits of the Cross. If it were not for God's mercy and Christ's death and resurrection, we would all be screwed. God's love reigns supreme. [58]

The biggest effect overall is the constant lack of security I always feel. It's a sense of not having a safety net of sorts. The lack of security carries over into my own marriage. Like if my own father could betray my mother, me, and my sister, why is my own husband above doing that? I have an answer: My husband has our Catholic faith, whereas my father grew up in a broken home with a biological father who apparently abused his wife. But a lack of moral knowledge and sacramental grace isn't the only factor that causes divorce. Catholics are divorcing, too. The bottom line is that my parents' divorce has brought insecurity into my own marriage. How could my husband love me enough never to betray our vows? Really, how is it even possible? I hate feeling that way.

And the effects don't stop with the original family. My mom's second marriage resulted in two more children, my half-brother and half-sister. My mom divorced my stepdad a few years ago. My half-sister called me today almost in tears...her dad's (my stepdad's) new girlfriend doesn't want to come to her two-year-old's birthday party because she's not ready to "party with your ex-wife's family," which apparently means my mom (the ex-wife), my full sister and myself, and my mom's parents. My half-sister is beside herself. It has begun, where the dating parent doesn't want the "significant other" to feel uncomfortable, so the child is temporarily or permanently abandoned. The happiness of the current romantic couple *always* trumps the happiness of the child. *Always*. [44]

Gosh, how to sum this up! My parents' divorce has had both positive (usually in spite of it) effects and negative ones. Some of the positives have been learning how to face adversity in observing my mother handle a tough situation, learning to find joy and happiness when life is challenging, and learning at a very young age the value of marriage. It fueled a strong desire in me to have my own family and to cherish that family; I learned to expect that marriage takes work. I remember being in my college apartment at age 19, staying up until



4:00 in the morning praying for all the families of the world, especially those struggling. I became passionate about helping others!

The negative effects weren't always apparent when I was younger but began to show more as I got older. I struggled with a sense of self-worth (I never blamed myself for the divorce, but, honestly, it was perplexing as to why my father felt he was better off not sharing our day-to-day lives. It didn't matter how verbally affectionate he was; he wasn't physically there day to day).

I also struggled to trust and commit to others. I would find myself thinking, "If a good person like my dad felt it was impossible to keep a very important commitment, how will I ever commit to important things? Will I just let people down? Will I get blindsided by terrible things that crop up and force me to leave? Or will I meet a 'good person' like my dad and wake up one day to him suddenly leaving?" I did not marry until I was almost 30 in spite of yearning to have a family, in no small part because I could not figure out how to commit long-term. I did not trust myself to discern accurately.

I experienced a very painful broken engagement at around age 25—so heartbreaking it almost resembled a divorce—and in part of the confusion of that break-up process, I remember thinking, "I might leave him one day. He could be perfect, and I still might not be able to control my emotions, and I might run away and destroy everything." I also was constantly looking for hidden, dark secrets in any man I dated...I had a really hard time believing a person could be free of some deep, dark disorder lurking and waiting to destroy our relationship. It was so confusing, because, by all accounts, I am a "successful," well-adjusted adult who for many, many years felt "fine" and totally accepting of my parents' split. I dated a lot; many men saw I was great "marriage material" and yet, the ripple effects of my parents' divorce crept into the relationships. Break-ups were also harder, as they often felt like mini-divorces, I once read that children of divorce often find themselves in constant break-up cycles, almost imitating the split they experienced as kids, and that rang true for me.

So, that's just the tip of the iceberg! [40]

I don't recall my parents ever getting along. They went to counseling, retreats, etc., but a lot of problems stemmed from my mother being very domineering and emotionally abusive, and my dad being very passive. Growing up, my brother and I dealt with a lot of their fighting and bickering; it was always a tense home environment. Our parents had centered their lives around us, and, since they didn't have a good relationship with each other, their marital discord only became more pronounced when my brother left for college and I got married. With the empty nest came their decision to divorce. [30]

I was just going into adolescence when it happened, so the effects were multiple. It destabilized my life in so many ways.

Economically, life became much harder because even though my father remained in my life and paid child support, my mother could never make ends meet on her own. I had an interest in music and dance that I could never pursue because we couldn't afford it. I never learned to drive. My life as a teen meant returning home after school to babysit my younger siblings.

My sexual maturity was most grievously affected. I literally went from pretending to be She-Ra with my friends and dressing up Barbie to learning about marital infidelity and sexual dissatisfaction. There was no transition. I was suddenly bombarded with knowledge of adult relationship issues, before I even had my first period.

My mother had taken a lover, a decision she justified by saying she was unhappy with my father, who could sometimes be insensitive and domineering. Within three months of their separation, this man was living with us, and my dad had a basement apartment downtown. This began a series of relationships my mother had with various men, which would continue until I was 18. All of them were "fun guys," none of them sexually abused us, though one had a kind of shady history and was just bizarre. However, one of the men was emotionally abusive to my mother, and he felt the need to "buddy up" to me by sharing sensitive sexual information about her. Funny thing was, all of these men were either divorced or divorcing.

I felt the need to write this because when I look at my own history and my mother's history, I think there may be a spiritual component at work. I think there is a spirit of adultery attached to our family line through my mother. The reason I feel this way is because the first man who was ever sexually attracted to me was married and had four children. He was my first sexual experience. I was 22 years old. After I got out of that relationship and before I met my husband, I went through a period where almost every man who showed any interest in me turned out to be married. When I lived in Montreal, I got asked out on dates by men all the time, and within a few conversations I would find out they were married. I didn't want to date married men. I was already horrified and guilt-ridden about what had happened with the first guy, and I felt like it had stained me somehow. And yet every adulterous man looking to sneak around on the mother of his children seemed to zero in on me for some reason. I met a nice guy while traveling through South America, and, after a couple of pleasant flirtatious experiences we slept together. (I was not Catholic at the time.) In a casual conversation about national ID cards, he showed me his Chilean ID: *estado civil*: married. Even when trying to avoid adulterous circumstances, they kept finding me. [4]

My parents' permanent separation has had a profound negative effect on my health. My mother called me on the day after my wedding anniversary to say that she could no longer stand my father and was so unhappy she would rather die than continue to live with him. She said she was going to get in her car and leave. My son was in his first grade classroom at the time, my two-year-old daughter was napping, and my husband was at his new job in downtown Chicago. I knew I had no way of driving 100 miles to my hometown to sit with her and calm her down. I thought she was going to drive herself into a tree or get into a terrible accident—killing herself and possibly others—as she was raging and emotionally out of control.

My body started shaking, and I called my mom's local parish priest who, by the grace of God, had just arrived back home to the rectory,

his coat still on. The priest knew my mother well, so I quickly explained who I was, that I was unable to travel, and then I ordered him to drive as fast as he could to my parents' home and sit with my mother so she wouldn't be dead. I told him to call me when he arrived and was with her, and he said he would. I hung up the phone, shaking like a leaf, and waited for his call. Suddenly, I noticed my heart was beating very irregularly, in a way it never had before. The priest called and said he had reached her and that she was calming down. I felt better, but for the next two years I had severe premature/extra heartbeats, also known as poly ventricular contractions.

Three days later, I came down with a bad case of shingles all over my face (as I sit here today, the top of my forehead is still partially numb from nerve damage). I was sick in bed with the worst pain I had ever had. Lightning pierced through my body. I was on massive doses of medication. After recovering from shingles enough to get out of the house, I drove up to a specialist. I truly thought I was going to die because my heart rate was as low as 39, and I could feel the thousands of extra heartbeats my heart was beating daily. I had a massive amount of tests, and my doctor, who is one of the best in the city, was more than perplexed and extremely concerned. My heart rate fluctuated and fell while in his office. He started me on beta blockers, but they were not enough. I ended up finding a local cardiologist very close to my house so I wouldn't have to worry about driving so much. I wore a monitor and took medicine to suppress the extra heartbeats. The medications worked, but I felt like hell for the next year. I was all ready to have an ablation (surgical procedure) to cauterize the affected areas of my heart so I could get off the medication, when the issues miraculously (very inexplicably) nearly went away.

I was starting to feel better later that fall, but then at my son's Cub Scout meeting one evening, I suddenly felt as if I were going to die again. The scoutmaster kindly told me I didn't look well. We went home, and I took my blood pressure: 185/112. I put my kids to bed and just lay still all night, awake, as I was deathly afraid of falling asleep and

having a massive heart attack. The next day, I saw my cardiologist and was put on more medications.

Everything regarding my heart was then, and still is, medically unexplained. I did a lot of medical research on my own and realized I had a variation of post-traumatic stress syndrome. I was literally suffering from a broken heart. I think I can say 100% accurately that my parents' selling my beloved childhood home on the river and moving to separate homes nearly killed me and has probably taken at least ten years away from my longevity. [70]

What effect has my parents' divorce had on me? It's shown me what *not* to do. It's also given me a trust complex. I had *no* idea that my parents were going to divorce, so when my mom broke the news to me, I thought she was joking. When I realized she wasn't, my world crumbled. I lost trust in my parents, which transferred to my relationship to God. Even today, I have a particularly hard time trusting in God; it's one part of my spiritual life I have to keep working at. Another thing is that I *cannot* handle change well. I know this is a result of my parents' divorce. I turn into a crazy person if a sudden change happens in our life, because the change in my parents' marriage was so sudden and unexpected. Even today, I need to be eased into changes. [57]

I worry that my lifespan may be reduced because of a tendency to fret and worry, not trust—never feeling secure, always anxious. I'm learning to address this and change it, but it can be difficult trying to trust a God you can't see when the parent that you can see hurt you. It's definitely not impossible, but it takes a long time to peel those layers. [8]

Oh geez...where to start? The biggest effect the divorce has had on me, I think, is my relationship with my mom. My mom and I were very close growing up; I am the baby of the family, and even she will tell you I was her favorite child to raise because I was so easy-going and loved

to have fun. She's primarily sanguine, and I'm primarily phlegmatic, so we have always been a good combination for fun (if you understand the temperaments). However, this close relationship between mother and son has been permanently damaged because of the divorce. We still have a good relationship in terms of having fun, joking, getting along etc. But, as I've grown older, there have been life occurrences that I've grown from and been changed by that I don't feel I can talk about with her.

When the divorce first happened, I was just in high school. Now that I'm an adult, I've gotten married and grown stronger in my faith—two major things that I can't fully talk about with a mom who left my dad and doesn't share my Catholic faith. The Catholic Church holds to Jesus' teachings on divorce and adultery unlike many Protestant churches, so talking about those things when her denomination doesn't teach and guide as strongly on those subjects—and when I'm not sure if she committed adultery or not (based on certain details)—is tough. The end result is a shallower relationship.

Another big way that the divorce has affected me is the issue of life events, such as a child's baptism, college graduation, birthday parties, etc. These naturally joyful events are awkward when both parents are present, especially when the one who wanted the divorce (mom) is remarried, and the other who didn't want the divorce (dad) is not remarried. My new life with divorced parents turned me into a referee between them, constantly worrying about giving each one the same amount of attention, and not letting my dad feel bad when talking to my mom and stepdad (as if I could control that). I dreaded them being in the same room and having to separate my time evenly so much that I refused to allow either of them to come to my college graduation, even though they paid for most of my schooling.

It's no different now for birthday parties or other big events. I have to choose who gets to come and who doesn't, or else I have to deal with them being in the same room. When sending a text about something going on in my life, I have to decide each time whether or not to send it as a group text or not. I have to call each one separately to tell them

something like when the family and I are coming to their town for a visit. Everything must be thought out and done twice. It's a lot more work on my end, and if I slip up or forget something here or there, one of my parents gets hurt feelings and feels left out—and I'm to blame. Isn't that ironic? [48]

How it affected me? Who knows? Our family was so messed up in other ways. My mother was a mentally ill, abusive alcoholic who killed herself a few months after the divorce. She was so sick that my eldest sisters (college-aged) felt (among other things) relief when she died. My father, who instigated the divorce, was emotionally absent (workaholic). I was neglected and abused before and after both the divorce and my father's subsequent remarriage. With those disclaimers, I probably would have experienced more stability and security as a child had my parents not divorced, crazy mother/absent father and all. If my parents hadn't divorced, it's likely my mother wouldn't have killed herself. (Not to go into details, but her words and actions at her death were directed at him—she got on the phone to him when she did it.)

Funny—until doing this survey, I have never considered how directly my mother's death was the result of the divorce. Not that I blame my father for her death—she did it—but without the divorce, it most likely wouldn't have happened. [21]

The impact my parents' divorce had on me? It screwed up my life and relationships with many people, especially men. When I was in a relationship, I always thought that I would leave before he got a chance to do so. My father was not present in my life until I was in my 20s, so I always believed that he did not love or care about me. It was very hurtful. I always wished I had the life where everyone ate dinner together and vacationed as a family—and it left me very angry inside.

My parents' divorce had a profound effect on my own 17-year marriage, and I truly believe that's why I'm alone. I have one sister and two brothers, and none of us are married. My sister married twice, my

older brother once, and my middle brother never. It is definitely because of my parents' divorce. [62]

The worst part in the beginning was the "choosing of sides." Since that was complicated, I chose no side. Both of my parents were difficult and psychologically abusive. My father had also been physically abusive to me. During one of my parents "reconciliations," we moved from Michigan to Arizona to "start over." I was 10. We were still living in Arizona when I was 20, and to avoid the situation of the divorce as well as situations stemming from my own bad decisions, I packed up and moved far away. I simply didn't contact them for a while. This had consequences, including not seeing my baby sister. In truth, the choosing of sides never ends. Eventually, I had to come down on my mom's side, but even that relationship is always strained. Is that a result of the divorce or just a difference of personality, behavior, and beliefs? Good question....

Who am I today? I am a dedicated husband who understands that God doesn't just come first, but is everything. My reliance and trust in God instructs and leads all my attitudes and actions as a husband, father, and everything. My parents respect my life as a devoted Catholic Christian, but they don't really understand it.

The crazy reality is that without the crucible of my childhood, I couldn't be the person I have become. Crazier still, seeds my parents (my primary catechists) unknowingly planted by their actions (good and bad) bore good fruit (I hope). So, my point is, watching the bad example of my parents' marriage/divorce and life choices has helped inform my decision-making process, helping me make better decisions. [3]

The divorce was a problem to be sure, but the bigger problem was the remarriages and them living so far apart. I had two places to live but no home. I recently realized that I was forced to abandon and then reconstitute my idea of family *seven times* by the time I was 23:



First family: my mom, dad, and me (and I do remember us being together before their split)

Second family: post divorce, still my mom, my dad, and me, but living in two homes; my two parents are single

Third family: my mother remarries; my dad is single

Fourth family: my father remarries; both parents are now remarried

Fifth family: my father divorces; he is single again, and I remember feeling excited that I'll get to spend more time with him; my mother is still married

Sixth family: my father remarries again; both parents are now remarried

Seventh family: my father and his third wife separate; he is single again, and my mother is still married

I think this is way too much to ask of somebody. And yet, our culture is obsessed with "choice" rhetoric, so this sort of thing goes on, and we can't judge it since that would be too "mean." [26]

I am pretty angry/sad about the divorce. There were six kids in the family, and, as a child, I really adored my dad. My mom was the kind of woman who was very blunt about things—practical, and not very sympathetic. She was sort of a "truth without love" kind of woman. She did care about her kids, but in a very controlling, fearful way, kind of like an angry martyr type. My dad was a chemist, and he worked long hours, read extensively, and knew everything about everything as far as I was concerned. I really respected him. He would tear up telling me stories about Mother Teresa, sacrifice, and love. And he knew the equations for the trajectory of a penny thrown in an arch when I was failing physics. I didn't know he didn't sleep in a suit, since I saw him in his blazer and tie every night and every morning when I woke up. He pretty much lived to take care of his family, and he tried to plan things like green oatmeal on St. Patrick's Day or family trips to Niagara Falls. We did a lot in the Church, and education was always stressed. My dad is, to this day, still very "religious/spiritual." As I got older, I realized

that my dad was more of a “love without truth” kind of man, when it came to people liking him, or sex, or just plain selfishness.

In a broad sense, I feel cheated out of “the perfect family,” even though I was an adult when they separated. I lost the security of a foundational home to return to when I was weary or needed advice. From then on, I had to listen to my mom complain about my dad, his sex life, his relationships, his irresponsibility, etc. And as for my relationship with my dad, I was expected to tolerate his bad behavior; he said to me once, “If I’m going to sin, I’m going to sin big.” Later, he would try to justify that behavior. When I tried to compare what he did to what his own father did, he became extremely angry and said I could not even compare him to his tyrant father (who left my grandmother for the mistress he’d had since my dad was a child). My dad eventually left the Catholic Church and became Lutheran, perhaps to feel justified in his own rules/relationship with God, which was “none of anyone else’s business.”

The selfishness and lack of sacrifice that led up to the divorce for years was just as harmful as the final divorce. I never saw my parents have physical affection for one another, which I always craved. They got along congenially and never fought, but there was a lot of biting sarcasm and separation under the same roof. Looking back, that’s where I get a lot of these “empty” feelings. I’m a huge perfectionist and have inherited much of my mom’s anger. Being angry helps me not to feel depressed, which is what my mom probably struggled with as well. My dad had depression, too. In our family, sarcasm and wit is a defense mechanism. We’ve all pretty much inherited that. So, we’re a funny bunch...with a lot of pain. I was honestly pretty shocked when my dad announced he was leaving my mom. I really thought that their Catholic faith (maybe in intellect only, if not in the heart) would keep them together. Divorce really isn’t something I thought would happen in our family.

My last thought is about what happened when my mom died. (And wow, this is pretty raw. I’m fighting a depression and trying to take care of myself physically, emotionally, and spiritually.) My sister, who

home-schools six children, was the only one capable of taking care of my mom during the short, very painful bout with cancer that took her life. The irony of the fact that my dad could have waited around for a few years and she would have died anyway was not lost on us. Instead, the burden shifted to my sister, especially, who was left with so many decisions to make, providing the care, etc. At first we didn't tell my dad about her illness, since that was what my mom wanted, but he figured it out, asked us, and we told him. Then he was offended because my mom didn't want him at her funeral. (Her only brother would be there, and he didn't have any warm feelings for my dad; my uncle and mom were very close.) Even before her illness, we had to make decisions for both our parents, for certain financial and living arrangements, etc. And every time we would think, *This wouldn't be a problem if you were still married!!* So after she died, my dad and his new wife wanted "closure" by going to the funeral, and we couldn't figure out why divorce, annulment, and remarriage weren't "closure" enough for them! They actually said they were very hurt because they were "a big part of her life"...um, yeah, the part where you left her and married an acquaintance/friend from the past.

So, even if you are an adult when the divorce happens, you still have angst every time there is a baptism, wedding, holiday, funeral, etc., and you worry about coordinating around each parent. And even after *death*, there are those dreaded thoughts about family get-togethers with the "other" family or just the awkwardness of what all went down. One time we saw a picture of my dad surrounded by his new extended "happy" family at the beach. My sister sent the picture to all of us six kids with the sarcastic note, "Remember when Dad invited us all to the beach for that family reunion? Oh, yeah, neither do I." So that bitterness of "my dad has a 'new' family" is still true for some adults! [23]

Profound sense of betrayal, failure, and frustration over the destruction of what was always affirmed as a non-negotiable. It broke the family up in so many ways that legacies and continuity of purpose

and the satisfaction of a mission well done were destroyed for this family's line. It made me determined *not* to do the same thing, as the effects were so heartbreaking. [47]

When my family was whole and my sister and I were younger, we had dinners together. My dad cooked for us, he made us do homework, and he read us our bedtime stories. He was the stern one when it came to rules and chores. My mom was a coordinator, the one to whom we went with sensitive things, the one in whom we confided. Both together gave my sisters and me a balance and sense of safety in our home. We went to Mass together every Sunday, and afterward we would have breakfast with our grandparents, aunts, and uncles. It was a happy, blessed time.

I remember the first time I encountered divorce was hearing about my uncle and aunt separating. My sisters and I bawled after hearing that my uncle and his wife were no longer a family. My heart ached that day.

When my parents were getting divorced my dad got to be the bearer of bad news. I was 14, and my sisters were 13 and 10. He told us after picking us up from our grandfather's house. He said, "Your mom doesn't love me anymore, so we are getting a divorce, and I will be moving out." He had to pull the car over because our loud painful crying made him break into tears all over again. Honestly, thinking about it now makes me want to cry all over again; talking about it or reliving it feels like ripping open an old wound that never fully healed.

I remember so many moments that just solidified and amplified the divide and separation between my parents. My mom let her bitter and angry emotions show when it came to our dad. We never knew when they fought before they separated, and all of a sudden anything they did to each other was discussed with us and thrown in each other's faces.

My dad gave up full custody of us because he figured it would be better for us to be with our mom, a woman. He wanted us to have a more consistent life, staying in the house they bought together. He would take the burden of the change.

My mom became demanding of him and possessive of us. She wanted itineraries for everything, wanting him to provide every detail for her to approve, or else she would not let us go with him. I remember one horrible experience when he came to the door to get us for our weekend with him, and he didn't have the itinerary; my mom shut the door in his face and refused to let him have us. He banged and banged on the door, desperately saying, "You are keeping me from my children!" She called the cops and got a restraining order against him because he was so upset at being kept from us that she felt threatened. My sisters and I huddled on my bed in the back room, crying and refusing to speak with her for the rest of the day.

The restraining order made it awkward to drop us off at my dad's apartment. He would have to stay so many feet away, and he couldn't come pick us up at our house. They couldn't attend the same events or school functions. We were truly a separated, segmented family. [2]

There were multiple divorces and remarriages among my parents and stepparents. A flowchart would be helpful. My parents did not seem to have much of a concern about how the divorce would affect the children at all. We were informed, and that was it. I remember trying to understand what it might mean, but I do not remember being particularly upset, depending on the situation, about the actual divorce. Separations happen long before divorces, which take a while. By the time the divorce happens, the parent who was leaving had been gone for a long time. I was always glad about that person being gone. The hurt came while living in the dysfunctional families. The marriages were generally train wrecks, and so it was often a relief when separation occurred and divorce sealed the deal (ironic, huh?).

I always assumed I would be taking care of myself and did not depend on them for my happiness, future prospects, etc. I knew I was on my own. I bought my own clothes, much of my own food, and worked for what I needed. I don't remember discussing it or processing it with anyone. I tried once to talk about it with my brother when I was about seven or eight, but he had no open reaction to it—none.

Honestly, I was often relieved to have a reason to get away and start new somewhere else with someone else, or at least away from some of the players in this tragedy. And there was a lot of abuse of different people in the story, and the relief that came from the separation and divorce was a positive. We moved a lot! Usually these marriages and divorces had a few moves associated with each of them, and so fresh starts were what I had to look forward to. I vowed to not hurt my kids that way.

How did this affect me? Less trust of people, as well as a tendency to pull away and handle things on my own if I do not get help. I don't ask for help. If someone wants to offer, fine, but in relationships, if it does not come freely from the other person, it will not be requested because that makes it not real.

Because things were so bad in the families where I grew up, it was *very* difficult to deal with Catholic teaching on marriage. So, I learned about the keys given to Peter, and stopped worrying about how I felt about it. Obedience to truth works for me. My feelings have to catch up later, sometimes. [15]

It's so odd that you are asking about the effects of divorce on children, because this is something that has been weighing heavily on my mind over the last few months.

Overall, my parents' divorce has had a profound effect on me. In my case, my dad actually won custody, which is very rare, and I went to my mom's every other weekend. Being raised by my dad, I was not taught any domestic skills, and later on refused to learn, which left me completely unprepared once I moved out on my own and in the early years of my marriage. Throughout my childhood, my mom repeatedly resorted to fear and guilt tactics to try and get us to live with her. I lived in fear of turning 12, as she told me that I would be required to stand in front of a judge and declare who I wanted to live with. (It turned out to not be true.)

There were also some other things. I developed extremely picky eating habits that started after the divorce and that I still struggle with.

During my teen years I became very bitter and angry, and I left the Church for over a decade. And although on the surface my relationship with my mother looks good, deep down I think I am still angry. I find myself internally rolling my eyes when she tries to give parenting advice or talks about how she "raised" us. How can I take the parenting advice of someone who only saw us four days a month? How can she claim to have raised us with so little actual face-to-face time invested in us? (That part is not her fault, as it was the custody arrangement.)

As soon as I graduated from high school, I moved far away—largely because I was so tired of being in between two worlds, so tired of getting caught in the middle. Due to finances, I ended up trapped in the new location for a lonely decade. I finally made my way back home, but those years of isolation and stress would not have happened had I not felt the need to run away. [25]

My parents' divorce set me up for a very difficult childhood and much confusion into adulthood, trying to understand what marriage and family is. My mother really had little choice in divorcing my dad, given that he was having multiple affairs, tried to push her into the swinger lifestyle, and declared bankruptcy without her knowing. After she left him, we were homeless, without a car, and dependent on loving family to get back on our feet. My mom worked two to three jobs until I was around 10 or 11, at which time she remarried.

I saw my dad maybe once every month or two. He would usually pick me up and take me on a bunch of errands—used car shopping, hitting the pawn shops, etc. Not having a significant paternal presence in my life for so many years made me fearful. I had no confidence and developed crippling anxiety; I would constantly try to get out of going to school to avoid social anxiety. I didn't trust men at all, and I still struggle with that.

Growing up, I used to watch my friends act in ways that were foreign to me. They were oddly self-assured and free of worry. Later I realized that their fathers had shown them how to have confidence in the world—they understood that their dads were always protecting

them and role modeling how loving men treat women and children. Not having that, I realized why I couldn't make sense of the world, or myself in it. I guess maybe my experience is actually closer to that of a child born out of wedlock. But divorce was the true cause, so hopefully some of what I'm sharing will be in some way useful. [39]

I was five when my parents divorced. They haven't spoken to each other without an attorney since then.

My parents' divorce and ongoing custody battle (which went on for *years*) has had an enormous impact on me. First and foremost, I will never get divorced! My husband knows all of the details of the divorce as well, and, if nothing else, it has served as an example of how *not* to resolve conflict.

When my parents divorced (due to my mother's several affairs, which I found out about later), my father was granted custody. This was very rare in the 1980s, but when my mom told the judge, "Just give me Jane and let him have Joe," and my dad said, "Absolutely not. If you're going to take one, you're going to have to take them both. They will not grow up apart from each other." After that, the judge said, "They'll live with their father."

My mom remarried a man with grown children; my father remarried a woman with two children my age. I went from one of two children to one of four. There was *so* much conflict in our home. I resented my new siblings and especially my stepmother. If I didn't get my way, I would threaten to leave and go live with my mother (at my mother's suggestion).

Once, during a particularly heated battle with my stepmother, I called my mom to tell her how unhappy I was. She suggested that I just pack my bags, and she and my stepfather would be there in the morning to get me. She assured me that everything would be fine. I didn't sleep that night. I packed all of my belongings in garbage bags. The next day, when my dad looked out the window and saw my mom and her husband, he asked what was going on. I told him I was leaving. He said, "Well happy [expletive] Father's Day!" I hadn't even realized it



was Father's Day, though I'm certain my mom planned that. I felt miserable, but I left. I had a new life as an only child and lots of freedom I didn't have before. But I also had a lot of loneliness; my mom worked and was career-driven, so I was home alone *a lot*. The following year, I returned to live with my father.

When the Army sent my father and stepmother to Korea, I decided to stay in the U.S. and return to my mother's home. High school was tough. Academically, it was easy, but adjusting to being alone again and facing common teenage temptations led me to lots of opportunities for trouble. And every time I got in trouble, I got a lecture from my stepfather. I hated him. I remember one lecture when he told me that if I didn't straighten up, he would be forced to divorce my mother. He emphasized that it would be my fault.

Then came college applications—with the manipulations, distortions, and guilt over finances from my mother and stepfather.

College = booze = promiscuity = pregnant and unwed at 22 = abortion = suicidal tendencies = self-loathing...

When I first published my abortion testimony, I wrote that many of the post-abortive women I have met come from divorced parents. That was the first time my mom acknowledged that my parents' divorce might have had an impact on me and my brother. [33]

I had just turned seven years old when my parents (mom and adoptive dad; I never knew my biological father) sat my nearly five-year-old brother and me down to tell us they were splitting up (there was another brother, six months old). I will never forget it, because the winter Olympics were on and we were watching the ice skating competitions. I sat and bawled in my mother's lap while my brother sat on the floor next to my dad, crying. They held us, told us everything would be okay, etc. Even as kids we knew it wouldn't be, and our world shattered all around us. That moment was the calmest chaos...all that came after was much more vicious.

As I grew up, I had no idea what truth, beauty, or goodness really meant in the context of life. Sure, I saw some things that were good or

true or beautiful, but they were mostly there in a relative way...which is really hard to explain. I had no concept of what marriage meant or looked like, because all I saw was a biological dad who didn't want me, an adoptive dad who kept me away from my biological mom and hid behind the court-ordered decree of divorce and child support as his reasons, and a stepdad who later on tried to show me love, but even his understanding was skewed. The fighting and threats, the taped phone conversations, the manipulation, everything wrong and evil in the world—all this I had to learn to adapt to, ignore, or try to protect my siblings from.

As I grew into my teen years, I developed an interest in the occult and was sexually promiscuous. I was horrible at relationships and really good at using people. I read tarot, messed around with lots of boys (and some girls at certain points), and had no trust for anyone or anything. Later I realized that I was not only mad at my parents but at God for allowing me to exist in the first place; for a season, I was suicidal. Oh how my heart breaks thinking of my earlier self! I was, and in some ways still am, very broken.

The divorce devastated me...I was shattered into a bazillion pieces and had the security of what was supposed to be unconditional love ripped away from me. It would be years before some of that began to heal...it will be years more until the healing is completed. And the scars? The scars will never go away. [55]

I'm quite sure I am not fully aware of all the effects of my parents' divorce.

I learned of my parents' impending separation and divorce from my oldest sister, who is eight years older than I am—so she was 13 at the time. I remember it took a few minutes for me to process, and I asked her many questions, but the first thought I had after it had sunk in was “my family is going to be broken.” The sheer dread I felt was overwhelming, and I still remember it to this day. It was a feeling of the bottom dropping out of my world, of my bubble of safety and security being burst, and of me going into free-fall. That was the first

of many moments of total devastation I would encounter in the coming years.

I quickly developed a fear of abandonment and could not trust that anything would ever be okay again; I lived in a state of suspicion and fear. I developed a feeling of total inadequacy and very low self-esteem that led to alcohol and drug abuse, along with promiscuity, in my teen years.

Eventually, after being put through a contentious custody battle, in which we, the five children, were forced to choose a parent with whom to live, my mother moved out of state with her husband. I was certain I had driven her away with my choice to live with my father and his new wife. I made that decision only because I craved my father's approval, and, even at my young age, I recognized that my father and stepmother had a more stable home. When my mother moved away, my fears of abandonment were strongly confirmed, and I suffered the loss of my mother very acutely at a time when I needed her the most; I was about 10 years old at that time. Once I was married, whenever my husband and I would hit a rough patch, I would want to bail, and it is a miracle of the grace and mercy of God that we are still (and happily) married now. [43]

My earliest memories of childhood and my parents' relationship are very happy, so there are some wounds that I do not share with many children of divorce. It wasn't until I was in middle school that the rift between my parents began to touch my heart. My father became involved in politics, and his dedication to that endeavor led to a widening gap between him and my mother; she had to care for the four of us alone, while my dad was away four months of the year during the state legislative session. Every re-election cycle, she would beg him not to run, but he felt he had to, in order to make our state a better place for his children and our future.

Around this time, my mother desired to go back to school and pursue her lifelong dream of being a photographer, to which my father strongly objected. Finally, he told her that if she wanted to do it, she

would have to pay for it herself—and so they began to have separate bank accounts, and my mother went to school. My dad commuted four hours roundtrip to the capitol and back during the week while mom was at school, and for a few years they somehow managed to make sure one of them was around. I remember relying greatly on friends in town—especially those with older siblings who could drive—to let me spend time at their place after school if I had choir or band practice. It was awkward, and I felt like a burden to my parents if ever I wanted to do something after school. So, I never tried out for sports, theater, or other activities that required regular meetings outside of school hours. As the oldest, I also was charged with watching my younger siblings after school, cooking frozen pizza or previously prepared meals (Dad would often make a lasagna for me to put in the oven later). I felt, therefore, that my responsibilities were at home, and that the fun things most of my classmates did outside of school had to be put aside; my family needed me. It was a heavy burden for a middle-schooler to carry.

Fast forward to my freshman year of college: Coming from a small Midwestern town, it was hard for me to be so far from the familiar. However, being two states away gave me the space I needed to find who I was—apart from this tense melancholy that seemed to hang around our home. At the time, I did not associate it with problems in my parents' marriage. It was March 25<sup>th</sup> of my freshman year, though, when a straw broke the camel's back: I had just returned to my dorm from having been initiated into the Knights of Columbus when the phone rang; it was my younger brother, who never calls. We were very close, but we never really called each other. I could hear in his voice that something was wrong, and he told me that he was using Mom's laptop for a school project (which all of us had permission to do) and discovered a series of letters written to some man in Ireland—a man with whom Mom was having an affair.

I still remember the feeling in my gut; I wanted to vomit. I felt so helpless, and then instantly my pseudo-parenting instinct and my big brother instinct rose up. I wanted so desperately to go home and take

care of this, to spare my brother the responsibility of dealing with this situation. But I couldn't. I had no car and very little money. Was I really going to ask my parents for the money I needed to go home and confront my mother about this? I told him to ask Mom about the letters, to see if maybe they were part of some art project or story she was writing, and to tell me how it goes. He did, and she claimed that it had happened a while ago, that Dad knew, and that everything was fine. My brother didn't believe her, and he called my dad. There was a lot of yelling, the word "divorce" was thrown around a lot, and my poor brother felt like it was all his fault. He loved our mother so much; he used to be very close to her, but to this day he struggles to have a relationship with her.

They tried marriage counseling, but my father gave up on it not long after. They soon began sleeping in separate rooms, and then living in separate houses, across the road from one another. I was in my philosophy studies in seminary when my dad finally divorced her, to pave the way for marrying a woman he had begun to see around that time. The same father who had formed my conscience and enforced my Catholic faith was a different man—broken, defeated. While this new woman had brought him back to life in many ways, I also found myself confused by how different he was. When my sister called me in tears after discovering the two of them were already sleeping together, I was crushed. Who was this man?

My wise and gentle superior at the time (I was preparing for priestly studies) recommended that I mourn the "death" of my dad, of the image of the man I had loved and who had raised me, so that there was room in my heart for my father, for who he was now. Not long after I began that difficult journey, another bombshell was dropped while I was meeting my siblings for dinner on New Year's Eve: My father had proposed to this woman and she accepted. I knew nothing about her except her first name and where she lived and worked, and all this I only knew via my sister, who discovered it from reading my father's Facebook page. Throughout his entire relationship with the woman who would become my stepmother, we were completely left

out of the loop. I was staying at my father's house when he returned from his trip, and he told me about the proposal. When I said I already knew about it, he said something that completely shocked me: "Well, I already know what you are going to say, and I don't want to hear it." He had no idea what I wanted to say, but it was clear that it didn't matter to him. The rest of my Christmas break was spent in painful silence. I found great healing on a retreat during spring break, during which God the Father made it known that He was my Father now, and always had been.

In April, when I was beginning to make my summer plans, I had to ask my dad when the wedding date was, as none of us children had received an invitation or information about it. What pained me most was the thought that because the annulment process was still ongoing, and because my father was remarrying outside the Church, I was going to have to deny my own father Communion at my First Mass one day. It was like a dagger of sorrow in my soul. He gave me the date, and said, "I expect you to be there." I prayed desperately for the annulment to be granted and, praise God, it was granted mere weeks before the wedding. The week leading up to the wedding was very painful; I was "expected" to go to the bachelor party (a harmless and enjoyable BBQ) that I was told about mere hours before it started.

While I was home on my family visit, my father asked me to tear down an old building on the farm. It was a blessed distraction and a fitting sign of all that was happening in my family: The familiar was being torn down to the very foundation, and something new was being built elsewhere. My siblings and I were not asked to have any part in the ceremony at all but, again, we were expected to be there. The four of us felt very awkward, neglected, and forced to put on a happy face.

Thankfully, my stepmother is a very kind and sweet woman; I can say truthfully that I love her dearly. But my relationship with my father has been altered, I think, forever, and my mother is still trying to make it on her own after the divorce and social estrangement from my dad's side of the family. She did not ask for anything in the divorce, and she

struggles financially. My father wants as little to do with her as possible.

My younger brother has taken the most grievous wound in all of this, a wound I wanted to take in his stead. He and I were very close growing up, but there is a great distance now, caused, I believe, by his efforts to protect his heart from ever being so hurt again. He also no longer practices his faith.

Forgive the long narrative, but I felt it necessary to tell the story, since the blade of divorce cut me at a time in life when I was better equipped to heal than are most children of divorce. The long term effects are mostly relational, but I will say this: While my parents' marriage was, sacramentally, null, the fact that I no longer have a place to call "home," nor a "family" per se, is a sadness that lingers about my siblings and me whenever we gather. As a religious, my opportunities to visit family are scarce, and each year I have to take turns spending Christmas with one or the other parent, as though I were in a joint-custody situation. It's a terrible thing, and I know it causes even greater suffering among my younger siblings, because they don't have the support of community life like I do. [24]

The fact that my biological parents never married and were never together was difficult. My mom married someone else when I was a toddler, then divorced when I was three or so. She remarried when I was five, divorced again when I was 11. She remarried again, divorced, then had a long-term relationship (he lived with us), then they broke up. She remarried again and is currently married. I never had a constant father besides my grandfather (thanks be to God), and I experienced much abuse because of these men. My mom and I have a difficult relationship. I recently realized it is the effects of what you would call "failure to protect." [66]

At first, the divorce seemed like a relief. I remember telling my sister, "It's about time," because we were so sick of it—they fought all the time, slept in separate rooms. My mom had been to divorce lawyers

a couple times, and we'd moved out of the house for periods of time, as had my dad.

The thing about divorce: The effects linger and linger, and actually get worse with time. Time doesn't make it right.

My children have a whole slew of "grandparents." My husband's mother has been divorced twice, and both her husbands have remarried. My mother-in-law told my mother that she was planning to remarry again, and my mom told her to do it! It would be wonderful! She wouldn't regret it! And I remember just crying that night, wondering, *How could they talk that way in front of us?* How was it right or just to claim that replacing my dad with someone else somehow made everything great? And, honestly, it's just really hard to see someone you don't even know become "Grandpa" to your kids when he's not your dad and there's no relationship there.

To make matters worse, with all the re-marriage after divorce, there are step-siblings and half-siblings and children from the second and third spouses' first and second marriages, too—all of whom we are supposed to embrace as "family," even as our parents rejected the very notion and building block of family, namely, *lifelong marriage*. And then, just to make things extra fun: We have some parents who didn't remarry. So they are alone, lonely, and rely on us to fill that void—which we can't ever fill, because we can't be the ever-present spouse. And then we are made to feel guilty for not being more concerned/present/supportive of their dating/remarrying.

There's also no "going home" after divorce. Everyone moved on, to new houses, new spouses, and new habits. It sounds silly, but my mother never watched TV when she was married to my dad. We had one ancient television, no cable, and an antenna on the roof that made a loud whirring sound when we adjusted it to get the Andy Griffith Show. She remarried, and now she watches NASCAR races. It's silly, right? After all, we all sort of meld with our spouses and take on their interests, but to see my mom obsessing about a racecar driver is like being on another planet. Like, "Who is this woman?"



So, things are different. The house is different, as is the food, the furniture, the beliefs. There is also a lack of shared memories. My mom doesn't often go down memory lane. We don't reminisce about "that one Christmas when someone hit our mailbox and your father grabbed my Japanese kimono and ran out into the street—he thought it was his robe." We don't eat a meal and think of all the other times we've shared that dish. We don't sit around in a comfortable way, the way I've seen other families behave. There's an awkwardness and formality around new spouses. I mostly find I crave the continuity and the tradition. What is family without tradition? [46]

A lot actually, especially regarding how I thought of men and marriage in my pre-adult years. I did not think much of men, because in my experience they weren't good for much, and I knew I did not need a husband to have children. In fact, I was very determined that I wanted children, but I did not want to saddle them with a dad who would break their heart and make them feel worthless. I really wasn't that nice to men/boys while a teenager. They were expendable. It literally took an act of God, and Him allowing me to witness my in-laws' love for one another and their family, for me to soften my heart and be open to marriage.

I just feel very passionately that divorce is a selfish move. It is putting yourself above everyone and everything. It is about what you want and it doesn't even matter how it affects everyone else. I really don't know what the world has come to when family means nothing anymore. It saddens me greatly. [59]

I had just stepped out of the shower, put on my PJs, and was towel drying my hair when my husband told me my grandfather had called to let me know my father had had a heart attack and died. The very first thought that went through my head—the *very first* reactionary thought—was, "I guess my parents won't be getting back together." At the time, I was a 35-year-old convert, a happily married mother of three.

I kind of think of myself as a victim of the trilogy of rotten childhood—an adopted, only child whose parents divorced when I was seven. Since that time, my father remarried four times. I was in two of the weddings, but not the first one. I remember meeting her, though. It was at my cousin's Little League game. I was playing with his little sister when my dad walked up with this woman. "I'd like to introduce you to my wife," he said. She had on a fur coat. We lived in Los Angeles.

He went on to father three children and sort of pseudo-adopted two step-children. (There were three other daughters his third wife brought to the deal, but I don't remember their names.) I'm not in contact with any of them, and I haven't been since shortly after my father passed away. I tried to keep in touch, but there was no one who kept in touch back. My mother never remarried.

Actually, my parents were married to each other twice: They split up before I was born, and then remarried—all within a few months, I think. My dad's parents had divorced in the 1940s, but his mother and stepfather had been married for 40 years. They were my stable force...until they divorced during my college years. My grandfather, the only grandfather I had ever known, was going to marry his mistress. I refused to go to the wedding. My aunt and uncle had split long ago, and now my closest cousin's parents were done as well. My mother's mother had left her husband back in Michigan shortly after my mother was born. I guess it was kind of a pattern.

I remember an awareness of difference during my elementary school years. All my friends had two parents, and siblings. I don't recall anyone else being from a divorced family. It was the mid '60s. I spent every other weekend with my dad. It was fun! Oh, the places we went—Disneyland, horseback riding, the mountains, a little beach village with shops and such that I really enjoyed. It was always quite entertaining, but returning home on Sunday night was miserable. He almost always ran late, and my mother was always mad.

The teen years went south for me. I always wanted a relationship, craved it in fact. With boyfriends, I became very serious, very quickly.

No one told me I shouldn't engage in sexual behavior, and so I did...very young. Far too young. My mom told me I would get a "reputation," but I didn't care.

When my father wasn't married, he was bar-hopping and sleeping with all sorts of women. I spent hours with him in piano bars...or on the couch in his apartment. Alcohol was an issue for him, and then for me as well. I spent holidays with my boyfriends' families—Thanksgiving, Christmas, it didn't matter. Looking back, I just wanted to leave my family behind and have a new experience.

As a young girl, I had attended a Billy Graham event and "got saved"; as a teen, I would attend Young Life or go to church youth groups with my new Christian friends. My newfound Christianity didn't change my behavior, and I always had crushes on the male counselors...again, anything male, I wanted. The pull for a male companion was always the biggest driving force for me.

The funny thing was I wouldn't stick with a relationship. I would find another boy and break up with my old boyfriend for the new one. I was not loyal. I fell hard. I even broke off an engagement in college to a nice Catholic guy. I had ruined a future marriage by cheating on my fiancé and then breaking up with him and jumping to another once again. I was destined to go from relationship to relationship...*wham, bam, thank you ma'am*...leaving a wake of victims behind me—including three of my own babies lost through abortion.

It was after the last abortion, after I broke off my engagement and graduated college, that I finally decided I didn't want this life anymore. I just wanted a family of my own. I moved home and sort of turned into a recluse.

I went to visit an old friend who had also gone through a recent separation. I had been her maid of honor not two years before, and her brother had been the best man. He was cute, and I liked him. We started dating. That was July of 1983, and we were married in January of 1984—in the Church.

He was from a non-practicing Catholic family, and I decided we would marry in the Church because I was noble enough to know if he

ever wanted to practice his Catholic faith, that would be important. But really it was because those Catholic churches were sooo pretty! I remember nothing about the Pre-Cana classes, except the old Irish priest that ran them had those rosy red cheeks (you know what I mean). One night he brought in a couple to discuss the beauty of Natural Family Planning. The wife looked exhausted, dark circles under her eyes. Not exactly an attractive image of the future for a young bride-to-be. My future sister-in-law liked her parish priest, and he married us. (He has since left the priesthood. Divorce all around for me I guess.)

So back to the night my father died. He had recently separated from his fifth wife, who was in Mexico with her new beau. He died of a massive heart attack with their two young sons there. He was destitute by that point.

I immediately called my mom to punish her. I woke her up. I wanted her to mourn. I consciously knew that I wanted her to mourn hard. If I couldn't have my family back together as I had always wished, then everyone should mourn the family as I had for all these years. To this day, and while writing this, I still feel that anger—that desire to punish her, or them, for my loss. (Hmmm, Father, better warm up the confessional. I guess I'm on my way—again.)

One of my best friends is a school nurse who is often brought into discussions with parents considering divorce. She recently shared with me that she always recalls my gut reaction to the news of my father's death. I guess that's why I responded to the request to contribute to this book. If she feels my story is noteworthy, maybe you will, too.

I could give many more details. There's plenty of emptiness to explore. [42]

## Chapter Two

# Feelings as Child vs. Feelings as Adult

*“What is the difference between how you felt about the divorce as a child and how you feel about it as an adult?”*

As a child, I thought my world would end. As an adult, I love and forgive my parents. I have to say, I was one of the "lucky" ones, because neither of my parents bad-mouthed the other. My dad was unfaithful, and my mom sure would have reason to do it, but she didn't. One thing I distinctly remember is that as a kid, I really loved (and still do love) my stepmom, and I hoped for the impossible: That my parents would get back together, and that somehow I would still get to keep Elaine. I think that speaks volumes as to how much kids want their parents together! [41]

As a child, I felt like I had to go along with it. As painful as it was, it was wrong of me to dislike it. I was supposed to be "happy" that my parents "weren't going to be fighting anymore," even though I didn't really remember them fighting all that much.

As an adult, I'm a little more angry about it, to be honest. I can see what marriage is like, being in a marriage for seven years now, and I know what must be done to get through the hard parts. Humility is so

key. Sacrifice is key. And it makes me angry and frustrated that they just gave up rather than be humble. [57]

I felt unimportant and insignificant as a child. My opinion did not matter. I just knew that my dad did not care about me or my brother. I did not want anything to do with him in return.

As a teenager I despised him and hated him for what he had done, especially to my brother, who had maintained a semi-sort of relationship with him but always ended up hurt.

As an adult I now don't really care. He has passed on, and I never really knew him. I often regret not knowing more about the family history and illnesses for my own children's sake, but I am resigned to the fact that I was better off without him. [59]

The difference between how I felt about the divorce as a child compared to now? Night and day. How can I explain it? My dad was gone a lot because of work; he had a long commute so we didn't see a lot of him. In fact, my dad had been kicked out of the house for a month, and I didn't notice. My next-door neighbor who was eight, who was older and much wiser, was the one who told me that my parents were separated. So, I didn't really miss my dad. And when my mother moved us across the state, we truly looked at it as an adventure. My mother explained that if she wasn't happy then she couldn't be a good mother, so of course we wanted her to be happy. Good-bye to our home, our extended family, our school, our church. I can still remember pulling away from our house—my mom driving the Datsun, my brothers, me and all the house plants in the car, along with Arthur the dog, our pet rabbit, and a half-empty fish tank with our goldfish sloshing around. I still remember the date. Not a year has gone by that I have not paused on that date.

I remember watching *The Goodbye Girl* and thinking it was cool to be a single mom. If anyone ever asked me back then about the divorce, I could honestly answer that it wasn't bad. My parents never fought;

my mom just wasn't happy, and my dad was never around anyway. It seemed okay to me.

My feelings changed after I had my own children. I had a difficult marriage, and now I had these most precious babies who deserved the very best I could give them, which—it became glaringly clear to me—was parents who are married. The more I struggled with my own marriage, the more I resented how easily my parents threw in the towel. I mean, my husband and I were really really struggling (quietly and privately) and yet we would keep at it. We felt a tremendous obligation to our children. We knew that they deserved better than what I lived through. So much of our struggle was from the effects of my own childhood. Year after year after year, my husband and I plowed through sadness, loneliness, and hopelessness for the sake of our kids.

All through our pain, we were the designated linchpin for the rest of the family. Our home was the one that hosted the holidays, and so we were the ones who continued to cater to my divorced parents and their need to be apart. It was hard. I grew very angry at my mother in particular. How could her happiness be more important than the long-term wellbeing of my brother and me? How could someone throw away my family and expect me to be fine with it? The worst of it all—the absolute most insane thing of it all—was just a couple of years ago, one aunt casually mentioned to me that if that other aunt hadn't been there that night, my mom wouldn't have put my dad's stuff on the porch. She said that to me. Let that sink in. If my aunt hadn't encouraged my mom to toss out my dad, she wouldn't have. The entire course of my life would have been different. Significantly different. Now, would there have been problems? I would imagine. But strangely, I saw my father do a decent job of raising his next set of kids. And I saw my mom cry for years and years, then finally turn bitter. [28]

I was young enough when they divorced that I don't really remember much about it. In some instances, I even thought it was

cool—two Christmases! But even that came with a downside, as I had to leave one house just after opening presents to go spend a week at the other house, so all presents at the first house would be untouched for a week.

As an adult, I am so tired of always having to do duplicate holidays. So now I host them, so that both sides will be together. (Fortunately their relationships have improved enough to make this possible.) I personally don't really like hosting and am not very good at it, but it's much preferable to having split holidays. [25]

As a child: I did not have an understanding of the divorce and initially felt personally rejected. It did not help that I had been especially close to my dad prior to their separation, and then I seldom saw him. My mother painted a picture of him as a monster. My mother was an impossible person to live with; she had many mental problems and was very much out of touch with reality. I felt sorry for her, but at the same time had no one to go to for comfort when she hurt me. She was especially emotionally abusive. Those years with my mother were the loneliest years of my life. When I was 12, my dad got custody of me. It was a relief, but I had learned to become very bitter. I resented my mother, especially for unjustly denying my dad his visitation rights. I saw him very rarely. I felt like my mother made a pawn out of me. I was bitter toward God feeling that he had shortchanged me. I still loved God and still wanted to serve Him, but on *my* terms.

As an adult: I feel very sad for my parents. I especially feel sad for my mother. Her bitterness and lack of forgiveness destroyed her. I feel sorry for my dad, because he tried so hard to be patient with her and love her. I did not want to have any more to do with my mother, because she never would accept that I loved my dad. He, on the other hand, kept trying to tell me to forgive her and to understand that she had mental problems. I felt like my mother was forcing me to choose between her and my dad, and my dad never made me make a choice. I did make a choice—it was my dad over my mother, and I wrote her out of my life.



As an adult who has returned to God: I feel very sad that I did not listen to my dad to forgive my mother, treat her kindly, and give her the respect that God commands that we give our parents, and I will always be grateful to God for His mercy toward me.

My feelings have changed in relation to my devotion to God. [45]

As a child, I felt like something was wrong with me (emotionally and relationally), but I really did not know what it was. As an adult who has read a bit on the effects of divorce, I came to understand better how it has affected me. If anything, I disapprove of the divorce even more strongly as an adult than I did as a child. [32]

Back then, I felt like divorce was more acceptable, and I didn't know that love was a decision more than anything. Now, I understand that marriage is sacred and a sacrament. I understand self-donative love more clearly. [20]

Speaking as an adult now, I can look back and see I wasn't totally fine as a child even if that was how I felt and what I told people years ago. It takes maturity and life experience sometimes to really understand why you did and said certain things in childhood! On the one hand, I enjoyed having two homes, a larger family (including step-siblings), and basically I was thankful that my parents were both in my life and generally polite to one another when I was growing up. I would even tell people it was no big deal or defend the arrangement as just another way to do family (although interestingly, it wasn't a way *I ever* wanted to "do family" when I grew up in spite of all my glowing reviews as a child).

But I also felt personally responsible for "taking care" of my parents, especially my dad's emotions. He could do no wrong; I wanted so badly to have a strong, unbreakable connection with him that even when he hurt me (like no-showing for yet another daddy-daughter date), I would justify and make excuses for him and stuff my own sadness deep down. I did not want him to feel bad; I wanted to build

him up. Isn't that backwards? I felt this was my role, even as a very young child. I have learned that it's super common for kids to feel like they are "taking care" of a parent (instead of vice versa) in divorce situations, but I didn't really know that's what I was doing at the time.

I would also have nightmares of my dad dying...there was a sense of fear that we could lose him forever. Interestingly, I almost never feared that about my mom. I knew she was here to stay.

As an adult, my feelings of sadness and occasional anger are much more on the surface than they were as a child. After 30 years of living this reality at many different life stages, I feel like I am more aware—and more accepting—of the reality that a divorced family is a complex and very imperfect arrangement. I no longer feel obligated to sugarcoat it or feel "okay" about every detail. I am thankful for good relationships—like with my stepfather—but it's not either/or in terms of feeling positively or negatively. I've had to learn to accept that it will always be mixed, and that any blessings I have come from a cross. This realization has helped me find more peace, maturity, and confidence in my own life. I am also saddened because the one thing I feared as a child—disconnection with my dad—has become a reality as his life has continued down a different path than mine.

(NOTE: My mom was pretty much a model ex-spouse, in that she almost never said negative things about my dad to us. It actually came as a shock to me when I realized at around age ten that my mom hadn't wanted the divorce and was sad about it; she still almost never breathed a negative word about my dad from there on out. As a child, I blamed her for the divorce. I now realize that was partly because she never disparaged him, so I assumed he couldn't be at fault, and partly because she was safe—I could blame her and feel anger towards her without fear of losing her.)

As an adult, I also feel the tension of complex family interactions affecting my children and husband—explaining grandparents' and in-laws' lives to them when they ask loaded questions—and, generally, I just feel sad when I think about what my mom went through. I am now in the age-range she was, and with the same number of kids she

had, when the divorce was unfolding. It's really hard to realize now the pain she must have experienced, and it's also *really* painful to look at my own kids and imagine putting them through something similar. [40]

As a child, I am not sure I can identify how I actually felt. I know I did not feel good about myself. I felt I did not measure up to others. I know now that it is partly because I was lacking my father in my life. As I look at it now, it was best that my father did leave, as the physical abuse was too much for my mother anymore. The chaos in our house was like hell. I now see it was by the grace of God that he did leave, to save us from further destruction. [36]

When you are seven years old, and you're playing outside with your friends...your mom calls you over to the house, and she is upset...Dad is standing next to her. She tells you that "we are getting a divorce," and you nod, and continue to play with your friends, exclaiming, "We're having a divorce! We're having a divorce!"...your world shifts, but you don't really know why. Dad is sleeping in the guest bedroom (in Maryland you had to be separated for a year, I believe, still living together), so maybe that's what divorce is? Then all of a sudden we move houses and it's just Mom and I. And then Dad comes and picks me up for the first time...it's weird. My life and world will never be the same.

I grew up, though, blaming my dad. He was the one who had the affair. He was the one who left. He was the one I had to go visit all the time. He was the one that I worried would leave—again—if I did something wrong.

But it was my mom whom I never wanted to upset. I always got good grades and followed the rules—I mean, I had my moments, as no kid is perfect—and rarely got in trouble. I somehow felt responsible for her reactions/feelings in life. I will never forget the day that I had a "surprise" for her if she didn't cry for the whole day. I jumped up and down on the hotel bed, "Yay! You didn't cry! You didn't cry!" I grew up

never wanting to upset my mom with sadness, anger, etc. She is a retired juvenile probation officer (who has a true gift and worked her tail off helping those kids), and I didn't want to be one of "her" kids, causing her more stress when she came home.

How did that become my responsibility? Of course, it wasn't. But, I took it on. And have been dealing with that probably for my whole life. This has played into my ability to make big decisions (subconsciously not wanting to do the wrong thing and upset someone), being able to deal with my emotions appropriately (never fully developing my own emotional formation because I felt responsible for someone else's), depression, not dating too much for fear of getting hurt and having that person leave.

So, sure. Do I have a great life? Yes! Absolutely. Are there things that I am struggling with? Yes. We all are in some way or another. Are people surprised to know some of the things that I deal with/have dealt with? Yes. Would I be dealing with these things if I my parents never divorced? No one will ever really know, I guess. [9]

I'm shocked at how affected I am. Having been an adult when this happened, I think I bought into my mom's vision of how this would go down, and I wasn't as angry or upset in the beginning. But as time has gone on, I see how little she did to salvage her marriage, probably because she had someone waiting in the wings, someone in whom she had been confiding about her bad marriage. This man has been a stressful member of our family and has changed my mom's outlook on her role as a mother/grandmother....She is stepping back, has very little do with us/them but for a few times a year. She's now very unattached and uncommitted to that part of her life.

Blended families are that whole feeble and awkward attempt to throw people together who are so different—in our case, different religions, politics, values, and traditions. It is extremely stressful and uncomfortable. This added byproduct of the divorce just adds to its sadness and discomfort. [38]

I was more sympathetic to the divorce as a child, and I did not acknowledge my own hurt. [29]

Childhood: The mom protects the children by making sure Dad calls, Dad is there to help, Dad signs the cards. Moms are the heart, and they take care of the kids and make sure Dad shows up. Dad is not there after the divorce. He can't be. He is not there to bless me every night. Not there for prayers. Not there to help with homework. He is not there. It is horrible.

Adulthood: I still hate that my parents are divorced. And that my dad remarried. I hate that at every family get-together, I am reminded that my family is broken. I hate it. I wish they had never gotten divorced. Basically, I don't want anyone to know that I am damaged. I don't want anyone to know the turmoil in my heart. I live in a community, my bubble, where there is really no divorce and messed-up stuff like I grew up with. It is weird. I have an incredible husband, and I guess I don't want him to know how messed up this made me. Yes, he would still love me. He is amazing. But I really keep this "messed-up me" hidden, and I try every day to focus on my family. Funny, when we were dating and he asked me the effect my parents' divorce had on me, I said, "Nothing!" Ha! Then we were married, and the cracks showed. My husband understands a lot now; he sees that divorce is horrible and that it has hurt me. [31]

As I child, I was matter-of-fact about the divorce. It seemed inevitable to me, just part of the path of life for people to go from partner to partner as their needs changed. I was explicitly taught this. I prided myself on—and received lots of praise for—helping my parents and handling things so well. Now I see how much I, my brother, and my step-siblings were damaged by divorce. I see the loss of self-knowledge, the paths wrongly taken, and the denied sadness of my life. And I can trace most of it back to that event.

I want to be clear that divorce isn't just one event in a child's life. It is a series of events, each creating fractures, and sometimes craters, in a

child's world. There were arguments I thought I could stop when I was six or seven. By eight years old, I was defending one parent to the other on a regular basis. I was oddly tuned in to their pain in a way that I hope most children are not. By nine, I was figuring out how to compartmentalize. My father returned to the Southeast after the divorce, and every time I went to visit him, I was not only orchestrating my relationship with him but also the relationships between the two families. How would I see my mom's family? How much time with my dad's? Who felt neglected or like I was "choosing" the "other" family over theirs? Fortunately, all this happened in an atmosphere of Southern civility, so there was rarely any overt discord; it was all unspoken. I never had to worry that my parents would misbehave in public or embarrass me in the way I know many kids of divorce experience. Even today, I am managing my parents' relationship with one another. My mother recently went through cancer treatment, and my father (who is still in love with her) sent her several consoling emails to which she would not respond. I had to beg her to at least send him a "thanks for thinking of me" email...which she cc'd me in on. All of this is the ongoing damage of divorce. [67]

A lot of confusion and uncertainty as a child. I am not close to my mom or my siblings. My father died a while ago. I was bitter growing up, because I felt I was missing out on a normal, secure family. [34]

I don't really feel any different about the divorce now. I always thought it was cruel and unfair. Only now, as a Catholic, I understand that marriage is a sacrament. And I understand the difference between a contract and a covenant that my parents most certainly did not grasp. [39]

As children, there was the shuffling around on holidays and weekends, the adjustments to step-family, and the attempts to navigate the different expectations in different households, to name a few

things. As kids, my twin sister and I accepted most of this stuff and embraced our bigger family as more people to love.

As we've gotten older and started our own families, this has become increasingly difficult to navigate. It's no longer just about us kids trying to fit into the holidays or get along with step-siblings, but now it's about our own kids and spouses also trying to navigate it. I have experienced marriage and family life as an adult, and it is much harder to accept my dad's life decisions now that I can see it from an adult perspective.

I never want my own kids to experience the family difficulties and dynamics that we experienced growing up. We absorbed the huge strain, always making the best of things, but we now realize that much of it was unhealthy. Those unhealthy dynamics have spilled over into unhealthy adult relationships with those members of the family, and it has impacted our kids' relationships with those family members as well. It also makes me hyper-vigilant in protecting my marriage and our healthy nuclear family, because I know the consequences of family breakdown.

We kids wanted our parents to be happy growing up. We bragged that we had two houses, multiple Christmases, and bigger families to love us. We said we wouldn't trade it for anything despite the difficulties. As an adult, I would definitely trade it for married parents and a stable household. I would rather have seen my parents grow and mature and stick it out than continue this lifetime of arduous and seemingly impossible family blending. I don't think we will ever "blend" with my step-family on my dad's side, nor will we blend well with the step-extended family on my mom's side. Thankfully, we have been able to form a great relationship with my mom, my stepdad, and his daughter.

My kids are left out of much of the grandparent relationships on my dad's side. It is hard for them to watch and understand. I have to explain our family structure in a way that does not promote divorce and that speaks to the truth and beauty of God's plan and marriage, while simultaneously trying not to throw their grandparents under the

bus. When visiting my dad's side, loaded comments are directed toward my kids and their biological cousins. And there is still this odd perception by my stepmom that she loves us just the same as her biological kids and loves her step grandkids just the same as her biological grandchild. The actions and words definitely aren't there to back up that perception. It's exhausting. I feel like I am reliving our own childhood, and it is just never-ending. All over again, we have to navigate holidays, the dysfunctional family dynamics, even the issue of money and how grandkids are treated, but we have to watch our own kids get hurt now—and explain it all to them.

I thought the hard part would be getting through childhood with divorced parents. That's simple in comparison to living out adulthood with divorced and remarried parents. [16]

I remember one evening very clearly when I was around nine years old—my parents were fighting, and I told them they should just get a divorce. My mother hung on to that statement and used it to help defend her choice to file for divorce many years later. As if a nine-year-old child has such wisdom and knowledge about such things that her “advice” should be taken to heart! Ridiculous.

In the end, it boiled down to what I perceive to be my mother's selfish choice. She claims the only reason she got married at age 18 was to get out of her house, and that she and my dad were too immature to know what they were doing. Ultimately, she just “wasn't happy.” Truth be told, my father has stuttered for years, and since he and my mom were divorced, he rarely stutters. She caused him so much grief and stress that he is so much happier and at peace now. He suffered from tremendous depression living with her.

*However*, while on the one hand I think they are each happier and at peace now that they are divorced, I do believe marriage is a covenant that should not be broken. As an adult now married for 13 years, I can see that my mother should have been more docile and allowed my father to lead the family. She criticized him to no end. On the one hand she complained that he needed to be more of a man, yet any time he



tried to step up as a leader, she mocked him or criticized how he would do things—so eventually he stopped trying, because what was the point? It was self-preservation! I get that now. [64]

I was devastated by the divorce, even at 16. Make no mistake—my parents should not have been together. They were toxic together, and mixing in alcohol made it worse. My father was physically abusive when he drank, and my mother was emotionally manipulative and passive-aggressive. Whatever love they once had for each other devolved into a battleground fought in our house, and they weren't worried about collateral damage. I think that as an adult I know that my parents shouldn't have been together, because they didn't respect each other enough to work out whatever their issues were. [52]

As a kid, I blamed my mom for some reason. She never said a bad word about my dad, so I think she was an easy target for me. I thought they were perfect for each other and that she must have messed it up (my poor mom). As I got older I realized he was a habitual cheater, and then I felt really hurt by him. Today I really have a sense of peace about the divorce, but that definitely didn't happen until I was an adult, probably getting close to 30. [50]

When I was little, I turned off my emotions because it was all too much. Our lives were in a constant state of upheaval. I had men in and out of my life (including abusers), half-siblings and step-siblings I never knew, step-grandparents we were expected to bond with, then having that entire "family" ripped away every single divorce, etc. When I reached my teens, I hit a dark depression and could not figure out why, because I had been out of touch with my emotions for too long. As an adult, I see now how horrible it was for all of us, and I wish there had been some sort of stability in my childhood. [66]

When I was a kid I was heartbroken. I missed my mom constantly. I despised my "adoptive" dad a lot, first because I became the "little

wife” in some ways, and later because I wasn’t even “his” but he refused to let me go back to my mom’s. I had to go along to get along...to the point where I wasn’t able to attend the funeral of my great-grandfather and was forced to go on a road trip/camping instead. I had no choices, and that was just life. It sucked, but I could do nothing about it...so I did my best to bury it way down deep where I thought it couldn’t touch me anymore...ha, that was me lying to myself just to survive.

As I came into adulthood, a few things happened. The first came when I was 18 and pregnant, a senior in high school. Pregnancy had made my anger surface, specifically my anger towards my mother. One night I hollered at her because she wasn’t doing enough to keep the other kids out of my pregnancy stash of junk food that I purchased with my own hard-earned money from the job I had working a fast food counter. She asked why I was so upset, and I let loose. I said, “You wanna know why?!” and she said, “Yes, I want to know why...please tell me.” And so I did. I yelled and cried and got most of it out, which basically boiled down to this: “You *left me!* You *left me* with him! I don’t understand why you *didn’t want me!*” And that began the healing...at least a part of it. We sat, we talked, we cried...I still didn’t, don’t, and probably never will understand...and it’s not okay. She knows, still, that I have an ache because of it. And I know that even in that, and even after all of it, I was, am, and always will be wanted by my heavenly Father! It took some time to get there, though.

The other thing that happened was that in my early twenties I met my husband. He was a very devout Catholic, who came from a very devout family, and they *all* started praying for me. I very heavily credit my still being alive to the fact that my husband decided he wanted me even in my brokenness. He *never* gave up on me, even when I gave him reason to walk away. It only made him pray and come after me harder. He is my literal, earthly life savior, and I am so thankful that God allowed me to have him. Through this meeting I have come to learn what love means, what truth means, what beauty is and isn’t. I converted to the Catholic faith from the brink of destruction I’d been teetering on for so long, and I’m still constantly working on healing, on

forgiving, on protecting my family from the mess that I grew up around.

I'm heartbroken now as an adult, but in a different way. Divorce has spanned my family for generations so the brokenness runs deep, but I have a more thorough understanding of what marriage is and isn't. As a child, since the age of two, I knew I wanted to be a wife and mother; as I got older I said no divorce, not ever, and no abortion, not ever; and as an adult I say let's break the vicious cycle and set things right. Praise be to God that, even when it sometimes put us at odds with the rest of the family, my husband and I are on the same path. [55]

As a child, it was like the end of the world. Now, I am just used to it being this way. I hate that my dad still lives far away, but I am grateful that I have my stepdad around. [60]

As a freshman in high school and throughout the rest of high school, I was fairly naïve to the situation and handled the changes that came without too much of a problem. I remember crying myself to sleep several times, praying that they wouldn't get divorced, but after it happened I quickly accepted it and moved on.

As an adult, knowing better God's teachings on marriage and divorce, and being a husband and a father myself, my emotions have changed from sadness to anger. I'm angry that the divorce happened and the ways in which it has affected me and my family forever. [48]

I was very resentful towards my mother as a child for leaving my father. I felt like he wouldn't have died of a drug overdose had she stayed with him and stuck it out. I felt like she left him in sickness. He was a drug addict and an alcoholic. Even with all of that and his adultery, my mother never spoke an ill word about my father to us, and I had no idea about the details.

As an adult with full responsibilities, I no longer resent my mother for leaving my father. She has confided in me that if she could go back

she would have done things differently, including not having any post-divorce relationships with men until we were grown; she can now see the negative impact that had on us girls. She has also said that she still would have left my father, but with more room for the possibility of reconciliation in the future, if and when he got better.

They did get back together and separate more than once, which was very hard emotionally. I would be so thrilled when they got back together, even writing the event in my journal as "Every child of divorce's dream" (having their parents re-marry). I would be crushed, then, when my father got drunk and my mom would tell me to pack my stuff, because "we're leaving again."

My mother does not stand as an innocent bystander. She had an affair with one of my father's friends, who ended up living with my mom and us girls after the divorce (*yuck!*). It was awful. *The* most damaging pain to a child is watching your parents find love with another mate other than your parent.

As an adult, I understand why my mother left. Though I might have made the same decision myself, I would do it a lot differently, especially in regard to giving much more effort to the marriage than my mother did. As *hard* as it would be, I would remain faithful to their father at least until my children were adults, because the pain for them is so deep. The divorce is hard enough (feels like your heart is being torn, stabbed, and ripped...physically), but to watch your parents be with other people is like adding vinegar to the wound. My mother and I have a very close relationship now, and she shares when I ask about her and my father. [1]

As a kid I felt isolated, confused, and relieved that my dad was gone. I wanted so much for him to be a better person than he was.

As an adult I'm so pissed that for some reason I got robbed of a good and normal and happy family. I can't even tell you of one good—truly good—childhood memory. I didn't have a terrible childhood, I just knew that being happy was a choice, not a given. So I decided to excel at school and put everything into what I did, no matter who was or

wasn't there to root for me. I'm also so, so, so grateful for my mom's realization that she needed to get us out of there before he started to hurt us. Sadly, she was right, he would have. He's in prison, hopefully forever, for molesting his daughter-in-law and her cousin. [68]

I swore I'd never put my own kids through what I went through. And in many respects I was able to keep that promise, but unfortunately their dad and I split up about eight years ago. Neither of us has remarried. Long story there, but the short version is that we met in a gnostic cult and our marriage was arranged.

It hurts every day because I often feel alone and stuck, emotionally trapped between the two worlds of my parents. You'd think that since my dad is dead, it wouldn't matter, but it does. They each rejected half of me, and this goes on forever. I take a little bit of comfort knowing that, in the sight of the Church, my parents' marriage (not the subsequent marriages) was the valid one. [26]

My parents told me as a child that they were never going to get a divorce, so when they finally decided that was what they were going to do, it was a shock. I had never thought that it was an option. [35]

I hate divorce. I hated the threat of it hanging over us as children. I hate that I ever let the word come out of my mouth as an adult. I hate that society thinks it's okay. I hate that we are not allowed to mourn such a grave loss. I hate that the court system is so unfair. I hate that people believe we can use a government institution to heal a sacrament and a covenant. I hate the euphemisms that are used in divorce ("children are resilient..." "maintain the same standard of living..."). I hate no-fault divorce and the feminist movement that made it okay. I hate that the Church doesn't do more to encourage people to stay together. I hate that I question the validity of annulments as much as I now question the validity of marriages. I hate that the Church makes you go through a divorce *before* seeing about the annulment. I think the annulment should come first. If it did, would more marriages stay

together? Would more people realize divorce is not an option? It was explained to me that the Church never wants to be seen as encouraging divorce, and so it waits to see if a divorce will actually occur before the annulment process begins. Isn't this backwards? I don't ever want to be seen as encouraging divorce, but as an adult, I had to face it in my marriage. I wish the Church had said, "Let's see if the marriage was really valid first, and then we can find the best way to deal with the results."

I hate divorce. I could go on. The only thing that's changed is my understanding of why I hate divorce. As a child, I knew it was bad, but couldn't articulate why. Now, I can, and I hate it even more.... [14]

I think as a child, I just didn't understand. My daddy was my world, and then he was just gone. My mom was always home, then suddenly she worked all the time. At six years old, I felt tremendous responsibility for my two-year-old sister. As a child, I think maybe it was my personality, or maybe I lost my ability to play make-believe, but I feel like I suddenly grew up.

As an adult, I just feel really sad—really sad, because I see the effect it has had on my parents. My mother struggled so hard to take care of us, and I remember being so mad that she wasn't home with us. I feel sad, because I see my dad still overwhelmed with guilt. He honestly has such a big heart, and he doesn't know how to deal with the pain he has inflicted on others and the pain that has been inflicted upon him. So, he's drinking himself to a slow death and it kills me to watch. [6]

As an adult, I now better understand the reasons for their separation. While I still don't agree, I at least have more answers. It has shown me how flawed and broken my mother is, and often makes me pity her. [61]

As a child, I never thought my parents would divorce. While I didn't see a super healthy relationship in my parents' marriage starting from about fourth grade onward, I still didn't think they would

divorce, because I didn't see it happen very often in my small town. I had heard of it in movies, and in the back of my mind I thought it was a very scary thing—families were broken up, and children had to live part-time with each parent. I also was scared at the thought of having to “love” a new stepdad or stepmom and obey them.

As an adult, and after going through the divorce, I am thankful that my siblings and I weren't super young when it happened, where we had to live in different houses and worry about custody arrangements. That would have been so stressful. I'm also glad that I never had to deal with being disciplined by a step-parent, someone coming into the picture after such a horrific experience. As an adult, it was much easier to get to know a step-parent, since there was no adult/child dynamic.

Now that I'm a parent, I've read too many articles that point out the dangers that come with being a single/divorced parent, especially a single mother. The children of single mothers are an easy target for abusers, and many times it's the mother's new boyfriend, stepfather, or older step-sibling. I don't mean to say this to sound alarmist; I'm saying this to point out that broken families become vulnerable, both spiritually and physically. [49]

I think the difference is that I can express myself better now. However, I find myself feeling very much the same feelings I felt as a child, which oftentimes makes me feel as if I never developed properly because of the divorce. It's almost as if there was some sort of stunting of growth, kind of like when you don't eat nutritious foods as a baby or child, you don't grow properly. [64]

I despised divorce then, I still despise it, and I will always despise it. I know that divorce is not an answer...it is at best an evil that can be tolerated in limited circumstances. I am in full agreement with the Church's teaching that it can only be “tolerated.” I view divorce attorneys with the same contempt that I view abortion “doctors.” In my law practice, I have been asked by my superiors to work on divorce

files, and I have refused. In my own marriage, I have many times felt like I wanted to quit or separate, but when the question of divorce would present itself in my mind, I was afraid of God, of losing my soul, and of what it would do to me, my kids, and even my wife—who at times has not been my favorite person in the world, even if she has often (or mostly) been “right.”

I do have a lasting, distinct memory from when I was five years old. It is a positive one, and I love to recall it. This was from when my parents were still married. My father had come home from work, and he came to the top of a staircase in our house, and he and my mother engaged in a long embrace at the top of the landing. I remember it like it was yesterday. I loved it then, and I love it now. It is hard to believe that two years later, they were engaging in what became a bloody war. [58]

I didn't know many of the details of the divorce when I was a child, so I was just confused and sad. As I grew older, I was angry. Now that I have converted to Catholicism and made an Act of Forgiveness, I accept it with a little tug in the pit of my stomach. I am very close to my parents and their spouses now. [33]

I've realized that marriage is work. You can't just “break up” and give someone back their stuff. As a young person, I was handed freedom when my parents divorced. I lived with Mom, and she was not strict. I would stay out all night, and I thought that was so cool because I never got into trouble for it. I cringe when I think of those times. [11]

I was about 23 years old when they divorced, so I never went through a child-to-adult transition. What I can say is that, despite what must have been a miserable marriage (other than having their children), I'm grateful my parents at least “waited” until we were adults (I was 23 years old, my sister was 19). I actually shudder to think what would have become of me had my parents divorced when I was



younger. Marriage is important, certainly, for the spouses, but I see the children as having an equal share in marriage. If you were to ask me whether parents who can't stand each other should get divorced and "be happy" or remain married for the sake of the children and "be miserable," I'd say remain married every time. Children need a father and a mother, obviously, but they need a father and a mother in the house with them, involved in their lives. When parents are divorced, these things are simply not possible to the extent they must be. [12]

I was not a child, but I was a struggling young mom at the time of my parents' divorce. Before the divorce, I was 18 and pregnant, disowned by my parents for a year or two (no help or contact), with no connection to my sisters. I lived with my boyfriend while I was pregnant and we were then married by a JP. I remember my older, seemingly indifferent, brother coming to my apartment and telling me that Mom and Dad were on the verge of a divorce—and it was most likely my fault. This was in the midst of some severe abuse from my husband that I kept secret for several years. I felt like a child, even though I was technically an adult. I didn't have a loving home with my husband or a stable home with parents to return to. My husband sometimes would drive very fast and swerve around, telling me he was going to kill us or he was going to drop me off at my parents'. I felt so unconnected to my childhood home that I rejected that choice; I would have rather risked being killed in the car than to go home and say I needed help. I thought about suicide a few times, but the baby and God's loving hand held me (even physically one night, when I wanted to throw the baby out the window and die).

Later, my mom helped me through school by watching the kids. I was desperate to show my parents that I could make it and keep my family together, etc. I needed to prove myself after I devastated them with becoming pregnant. At that point I was 24 and the abuse was severe, so after I got my first nursing job, I separated from my husband. When my parents separated around the same time, my mom came to live in the apartment next to mine. My dad stayed in the house a while,

and then they sold it. They had a verbal agreement about finances, but it took my dad another 12 or 13 years to finalize the divorce. My mom thought he didn't want to make a commitment to whichever woman he was living with at the time, so he always stalled on the divorce papers.

I heard lots and lots and lots of stories about their separation and divorce; every story was painful, and I was dutiful and listened. My mom was so...practical. One time, I told her I knew it must be painful for her to see my father be with other women. She laughed at me and said no, that she was more embarrassed in the beginning, but that she *liked* living alone and didn't want to be his "nurse and housekeeper."

My evolution of how I felt about my parents' divorce went from "logical conclusion" (because of their lack of affection and sacrifice for one another) to anger (for not being allowed to have a "normal" family). After about two or three years living next to my mom, I had to get away. I moved as far away in the United States as I could. I'm still pretty angry—not just at the divorce, but particularly at my father. Why didn't he see what his own dad did and not repeat history? Why didn't he lay down his life for his family? I'm actually pretty angry at men in general, I think. Like, where are the men who lay themselves down for their families? I'm angry at myself, because I'm in another marriage where I can't be sacrificial, where my spouse has mental illness and addictions and I don't really know how to love him. Or more to the point, I know I can't love him on my own, but there is so much resistance in my heart to let God let me love him. That's how I feel about my parents' divorce as an adult. Angry. And sad. But more angry, because I won't jump off a cliff when I'm angry. It's a defense mechanism, to save myself. So much of my parents' relationship shaped me, along with other things, that the divorce was just a straw on the camel's back. [23]

As a child, I was overwhelmed by my anger. As an adult, I can better appreciate the complexities of relationships and life and even our

own human frailty when it comes to weathering the storms of marriage. [65]

I remember being completely numb to the idea that my parents might divorce, except for the many times I wished they would divorce so that we didn't have to hear their fighting. I now feel nothing but compassion for those who live through divorce, but, in general, I feel it is a great tragedy, the effects of which ripple through many generations. I don't believe that anyone sets out to suffer or cause family members pain, but when the pain becomes so unbearable that divorce is their last grasp at happiness, my heart genuinely bleeds for them, especially those with young children. Parents, after all, are the sun, moon, and stars to their children. I know that the thought of being forcefully driven from my children is unfathomable to me. As an adult child of divorce, I feel divorce should be avoided at all costs, if possible. [13]

Even though I was raised with extremely poor theology back in the 1970s and '80s (I was born in '69), I always thought divorce was terribly wrong, and I never dreamed it would happen to my parents. Now as a 47-year-old in my 11th year of marriage, I realize people divorce for primarily selfish reasons, as well as for untreated emotional and mental health issues. They don't have the foundation or the will to die unto themselves as Jesus did and calls us to do. They are looking forward but not *up*.

I also definitely see divorce as the fruits of generational sin. My mother's father was an abusive alcoholic who beat up and cheated on my grandmother. Mom had a terribly dysfunctional childhood, ending up with narcissistic personality disorder as a result. She is a lovely woman with a terrible lack of empathy and forgiveness. Her father made her and her two brothers multi-millionaires, and she looks to him as her hero. My dad, who almost went bankrupt when his furniture business went under, is a "loser." My grandfather's parents were successful but (I believe) not good people. His two brothers were

very dishonest. One of my mother's brothers is a sociopath; the other probably has a rage disorder and likely bipolar disorder. Most of their kids have serious issues (alcoholism, narcissism, homosexuality). I wonder how far back this type of sin goes, as my mother's family is so profoundly dysfunctional. [70]

It wasn't until I moved to a different city for college and had my own place by myself that I realized how much my dad struggled financially and how lonely he must have been. I called him one night crying and apologizing for being an ungrateful teenager.

I want to state that I love both my mom and my dad very deeply. I admire my mom for raising us on (what must have felt like) her own. And I admire my dad for the sacrifices I know he made to give us the childhood we had. My mom, my sisters, and I are crazy close; we talk about anything. Mom feels more like a close friend than a mother now that I am older. I respect her and cherish her advice. My relationship with my dad is harder. We have years of hurt and non-communication still to overcome. He remarried, and his wife is sweet and giving, but at times it feels like he has a whole separate family that my sisters and I are not a part of.

My mom has had a boyfriend, whom we call "StepDad," for the last 17 years. He is also divorced with three daughters. We all grew up together, but in separate households. Whenever I visit them, I feel like I have three families: My sisters, me, and Mom; StepDad and my stepsisters; Dad, his wife, and her daughter. [2]

As a child I felt torn between my parents. I felt bad for my dad, even though he was the one who had the affair and filed for divorce. I was angry, and I took that out on my mom because I lived with her. I always felt like I had to defend my parents to the opposite side of the family.

As an adult, I just get pissed because of how awkward everything is. For example, having a parent who is dating is both awkward and sad, because when they're dating, they're often neglecting their

children and grandchildren, and choosing this new love interest over the people that should matter more. It's like watching your parent be a teenager all over again, and it's both disgusting and worrisome. Enter another state of neglect due to divorce. I get irritated that I have to answer questions from my own children who are wondering why their grandparents don't live together. They keep asking me why their grandparents "don't believe in God" or why they "don't listen to God." My children can't piece together who my parents even are. They address four people on my side of the family as a grandparent. Two previous "grandparents" don't come around anymore because they were my stepparents. It's chaotic and confusing, and I sense that my children are now being negatively impacted by my father's decision to get a piece of a\*\* back in the day!! Like I said, it all pisses me off! [44]

As a child, it felt like my whole world fell apart. I never saw it coming. I did my best to forget it was happening, to busy myself with other things so that I didn't have to think about it. It was something pretty foreign to me. None of my other friends' parents were divorced. It wasn't something I wanted to talk about. I didn't want to be labeled as "that kid" or get treated differently because of it. I think I labeled myself that way.

Now, as an adult (or young adult, I suppose), I still prefer to not think about it; I don't tell people directly. I don't label myself as "that kid" anymore because I have made a name for myself, not in a prideful way, but in me becoming my own person, being my own adult self, away from that. Now that I have a greater understanding of Church teaching and God's plan for marriage (through my own study and university classes), I understand the gravity of it all. [37]

As a child, I envisioned divorce as something for really messed-up families, or alcoholics, or druggies. Now, I view it as the cop-out for people who give up on their marriage covenant and choose not to work on it. [10]

There are a few differences between how I felt then, as a teenager, and how I feel now. As a teenager, I thought it was for the best. They had terrible, awful fights almost every night. I thought it would be better once all of the fighting was over. Now, I know better. Now I know that the division in the family is so much worse. The guilt, the sadness, the worry...it's all much worse to deal with than the fights. At least when they were fighting, they were together, and they were working on things. Now, there's nothing. There are cordial conversations when they have to spend time together, but once they are apart, they're apart. There's no contact other than about separation things. And as horrible as the fights were, the separation is worse. I miss my family being whole. I miss spending holidays together, as trivial as that may seem. But I didn't think about any of that when it first happened. All I could think about was ending the fights. [22]

As an adult child of divorce, there is no 20/20 hindsight. You were a child when something incredibly traumatic happened, and you will always look at it through the eyes you had and the age you were when it happened. It becomes an event that is frozen in time. The wound festers, but never heals. As an adult, you often imagine yourself in the role of your parents, making the same choices they made. You imagine the subtext that was unique to their marriage...trying to make sense of how that situation was created...and you try to find a way in which it makes sense to you and your circumstances. It's itchy though, and it never fits. That's the legacy of sin—it doesn't resolve itself and it doesn't fit. The pain of a broken family is brought back to the surface at *every* juncture where a family bond is encountered and pondered. It's the reason why you didn't know your cousins well (or at all?) or have any meaningful relationships with aunts/uncles, etc. It's the reason your extended family is outside the bubble and either doesn't want to have anything to do with the toxic situation your parents created in the divorce, or doesn't understand how to relate to you. Dysfunction invariably surfaces in each interaction you do have, and the reality of your parents' divorce is that the fruit it grows is never out of reach—

but that fruit nourishes only more dysfunction. Divorce is a life sentence for the child.

My parents were not children of divorce and have lacked any understanding of why their children would feel differently than they do about family. They don't understand that *their foundation was cemented securely in family* and that what they gave their own children was *a house built on sand in a flood plain during hurricane season*. There's a big difference between the two, with my end being filled with unique insecurities they can't seem to grasp, different coping skills they have no use for, and different values they don't understand a need to have. The relationship never matures between us like the natural progression I see others enjoy with their parents...because it can't. It's always in perpetual crisis and blame mode. It's always broken, and I am always a representation of the broken thing.

For me, there was a lot of judgment when I refused to acquiesce to my parents' decisions from my youth. As an adult, they have sought reassurance from me that they did the right thing. They have even commanded it from me like disciplinarians, or lectured me on how it was for my own good. Kind of the same way a door-to-door salesman might extol the virtues of buying a \$1500 vacuum in a sales pitch to a homeless person. The role reversal is but another symptom of the child having to manage dysfunction at every juncture when it involves parental interaction. Divorced parents become the lost child when their adult child will not follow their commands, and they have zero understanding of why they can't dictate the terms of their child's experience. I have come to think that my parents had to dehumanize me in order to justify destroying my family structure...

As a child, I will simply say that I felt helpless to have any real impact on the slow train wreck that I was forced to watch. I lacked the ability to be heard in any real way, and I felt my existence was a thorn in everyone's side, reminding them of someone they didn't want to be, of a history they didn't want to have, with me being vaguely reminiscent of a person they hated. That left a mark far greater than any childhood punishment ever did. [69]

I think I was jealous of regular families when I was a child, and it seemed like I had many more crosses (financial, attention). I'm not sure if jealousy is the right word, but there was a very apparent separation between myself and others who had both parents. I remember crying every morning as a toddler when my mom left for work and my grandma would watch me. There's a difference, and a feeling of "why does my mom have to work?"

Now, as an adult, I realize that I haven't had a positive example of what a marriage should look like. I know some things to avoid, but I don't know what an ideal (or one that strives to be ideal) marriage looks like. [19]

I was a very young adult when the divorce actually occurred, but I was a child when the roots of it began to surface. I remember feeling at times like I had to choose sides whenever my parents would argue; divorce forces children to choose one parent over the other. There is no way to avoid it. When a husband and wife are divided against each other, that division necessarily involves the children. There is hardly a crueler abuse than making a child choose which parent he or she shall love more! I appreciate that my parents tried their best to hide their division from us, and that they even resolved never to consider divorce until all of us were out of the house. But even a hidden corpse reeks, and though we children didn't know what the "smell" was, we knew in our hearts that something was wrong in our family, and it left its mark.

As I have grown, I've gotten to the point where I am able to see my parents as human beings with their own shortcomings and problems. I see the many mistakes and choices each parent made that led to the collapse of their relationship, and I've forgiven them. I don't have anger as much as I have pity and sorrow. [24]

As a child: I was simply sad. I wanted my parents to stay together and our family to be intact. I was reading *These Happy Golden Years* one afternoon, and my parents came home and told me that their divorce was final. I cried and felt so sad that our lives were the opposite of what



I'd been reading. The irony of it was painful. I missed my father and wanted to live with him, but I was told my mother "needed us" more than my father did, and that's why we had to live with her. Nice burden to put on a kid!

As an adult: I see that my parents' divorce was the fruit of lives lived without regard to God and His ways. I cannot imagine how different our lives could have been if my parents had been Christian and had had the support of the Catholic Church. I still feel sad about their divorce, but now I understand the real tragedy of it—that there was another way our family life could have unfolded.

Again, I can't really separate the divorce from all the other trauma of my childhood, but it's part of the terrible legacy my parents gave us. I struggle every day with depression and anxiety, with being a gentle and loving mother, and with being a submissive wife. It is just *so hard*, although I am so grateful that God has redeemed my life and that I don't have to live like my family did. [21]

I accepted it as a child, because I knew no different. I knew it was devastating, and I knew I was hurting, but I had been convinced that it was "the best thing for everyone." I now know it was the best thing for no one—not my parents and certainly not the children. [43]

As a child, even though I went to Catholic school for some of those years, divorce was just a looming reality over life. I knew tons of divorced families. I never gave it much thought. When I did, I wished my parents would get divorced. But, mostly, I just wished I had different parents. I idealized other people's lives, thinking everyone else had it perfect, and I should too.

As an adult now, and a Catholic educator, I see the damage of divorce. Families torn apart..I know acutely the damage it is doing to children. I have seen teens descend into drug use and crime directly as a result of the pain they are trying to express from their parents' ugly divorces. I wonder if there is such a thing as a clean, friendly divorce? I

don't see them. I see parents acting selfishly in their pain and using the children as pawns. I know my parents did the same.

I am my wife's second husband. We spent the first couple years of our marriage cleaning wreckage from her previous marriage. We worked very hard to shield the children from the situation. But, I have no illusions. We may have succeeded in limiting the damage, but the damage is there.

On a side note, yes, my wife's previous marriage was declared null, and we are in a sacramental union. [3]

When I was a child and my parents were still together (they separated after I became an adult), I actually thought it must be pretty neat for my friends who had two families and two Christmas celebrations and often a long summer vacation to visit the distant parent. Looking back, I can now see how hard it was for them. One friend in particular tried to tell me how hard it was to live with her dad and stepmother all summer when she felt like she wasn't even a part of that family. [7]

It's worse now. It's compounded by my parents now having grandchildren, to whom we will have to explain this mess. Having my own children makes it more difficult to understand someone giving up on a marriage. I cannot imagine not having my children with me every day, or relinquishing control to my ex-husband's girlfriend/wife.

More thoughts about then and now: As a child, I remember going to friends' houses and just delighting in the very basic domestic peace I found there. One friend in particular would be so annoyed that she had to set the table, sit as a family every night for the meal, and then clean up after dinner with her brother. I was secretly thrilled to hear the call: "Time to set the table!" I thought it seemed positively miraculous when her parents said things like, "I'll talk to your dad and let you know," in response to a question about watching a certain movie, spending the night at a friend's house, or buying a certain outfit.

My husband and I both are constantly looking for "parents." We missed out on all the structure and discipline that comes from a united parenting front. We both wandered around for a decade, not knowing what to do, what to be, what to look for in a spouse. Granted, we were not raised in Catholic homes, so much of that direction was missing anyway—things like vocations and the real ends of marriage, the "forever" of marriage.

But we both find that we are constantly wanting the father figure and mother figure, even at our age, even as parents ourselves. When your actual parents sort of move on from your family, there's a lack of trust there and also a lack of judgment. It's hard to trust the advice of those who once decided you don't actually need your parents to be together, that weekend visits will suffice, and that their new romantic relationships will be wonderful for everyone.

As a mother now, I'm very conscious that we should be our children's launching pads. We should not force them to support whatever is involved in our adult quest for "happiness." We need to be the parents, so they aren't drifting. I think that was always impossible for my parents, because they were constantly at odds with each other and didn't have the energy, time, or desire to tackle all the needs of children on top of a dysfunctional marriage. [46]

I honestly do not remember actually "feeling" my feelings at the time of the divorce. I was a firstborn, overachieving girl who went into survival mode most of my childhood. I also had to deal with the fact that both of my parents were alcoholics. I was very busy taking care of my emotionally immature and dependent parents, so I shoved my feelings down inside and just stayed in survival mode, taking care of them and my younger sister. Today, I do recognize that spouses may need to separate for a time for reasons of safety and the well-being of some or all of the family; however, I do not believe that the sacred bond between a couple in a sacramental marriage is so irretrievably broken that it must end in divorce. Ultimately, I would withhold judgment on those who do divorce, deferring to Holy Mother Church

(tribunal) on whether or not those marriages were, in fact, sacramental. [63]

Although a young adult at the time of the divorce, the feelings are no different, except one is not as vulnerable to the physical effects such as abandonment or a reduced standard of living. Emotionally, it is still as devastating and shocking. [47]

As a child, the divorce made me very insecure, lost, and abandoned. It was incredibly sad and disorientating.

As an adult with a marriage of my own, I think I am more sympathetic to what my mom and dad both probably went through. During the marriage, my dad had to work two jobs, and my mom was constantly tired with the kids and the house. They were both likely under almost constant stress, and after a while they failed to make each other a priority. I can see now how easily that can happen. It has motivated me not to make the same mistakes! [54]

As a teen, I believed everything my mother said. I believed that she had a right to be happy, and that my father was not a good husband. I sympathized with her, and I took her side in everything. I was also a feminist at that time—my mom went back to school and got soaked in victim feminism, a nice complement to the Oprah feminism she was absorbing from '90s pop culture. Basically, nothing is ever a woman's fault, even the stuff she does to herself and the stuff she does to others. Now, and especially after trying to make a difficult marriage work, I realize she was in the wrong. My dad never insulted her or treated her badly (like my husband did to me), and yet she left him. And she wasn't much happier for having done so. Her relationships were short-lived and she was full of resentment, always feeling like my dad got the better end of the deal, even though he gave up practically everything he owned. [4]

When I was small, it seemed normal. I loved my stepmom and step-siblings, and I didn't sense anything wrong. As I have gotten older, I have wanted to know what it really means to be my father's son. That pain and longing has only intensified in the 27 years since he died. [51]

I still feel abandoned. As a young adult, I also felt as though my idol had been knocked off of his pedestal. I adored my daddy, and I lost him with the divorce. We reconciled years later, but he was just my dad, not "Daddy," and he didn't even come to my wedding. [18]



## Chapter Three

# View of Marriage

*“Has your parents’ divorce affected your own marriage or your view of marriage?”*

It has strengthened my view of marriage, because I see how horrible divorce is firsthand. So, like St. Paul says in Romans 8:28, God turned that around for good. But of course, divorce is still a horrible scourge, and I wouldn’t have wanted my parents’ divorce in the first place. [57]

The divorce has only strengthened my marriage. I don’t want to repeat the mistakes of my parents. Because of the zeal I have, I work hard at our marriage and want so badly to model a holy, Catholic marriage for my kids and love my wife like crazy. I’ll always remember the words of the priest during the homily of our wedding Mass when he pointed to the crucifix and said, “That is your job, and if you aren’t ready for it, then we shouldn’t be having this wedding.” My wife and kids deserve nothing less. [48]

In the beginning, I didn’t have any idea what this meant: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Matt. 19:5, cf. Gen 2:24). Of course you leave your parents...duh...but the beauty and fullness of the marital embrace was way over my head. And it also wasn’t such a big

deal to me when other marriages fell apart; if they weren't happy, it was sad, but so what? That's just what you did. Um, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong! I yell at myself for ever thinking that way.

Our troublesome years were the first couple of years. They were ugly, and for a few months I even moved out. Then the Holy Spirit gave me a nice 2x4 upside my head, and slowly I came around to seeing that I was wrong on so many levels it wasn't even funny. We started working through things with a marriage counselor, and we started to attend Mass! One of the biggest sacrifices my husband has made (and there have been many) was to refrain from receiving the Eucharist before our marriage was convalidated...for over four years. But for the grace of God, I don't know how he survived me during all that time. I see now that things are ordered in such a way that if we are obedient from the get-go, man is it easy! [55]

Sometimes I feel like I don't know "how to be married." If I feel lost, I don't have anyone to talk to about it. I don't have my parents to share the joy of my marriage. My parents did good things in their marriage, and those things I hold on to—it's just not as easy; so, I often look for other marriages that are successful, and I take a lot from those couples. I hope and pray that my son will marry and stay married. [11]

My parents' divorce and my own conversion to Catholicism have made me fiercely pro-marriage. The two act in concert (my experience and my conversion), but conversion was the catalyst. The divorce enhanced feelings and opinions which were built by my faith. Before my conversion, I was a happy soldier for modern marriage, toeing the line and claiming that people had a right to be happy, even if it meant divorce. Some marriages work out and some don't. I celebrated blended families and gained five step-siblings from my parents' remarriages. Looking back, I know now that I simply did not want to level any kind of judgment against my father. [5]



My own view of marriage is that it is indissoluble until death. That was how I viewed it as a six-year-old. When my mother explained divorce to me, she said it was that she and my father would “not be married anymore.” My immediate thought was, “You can do that?” And of course, you can’t, and the Church affirms that. The Faith was one of the casualties of the divorce, and my brothers and I were subsequently raised with no religion. I eventually embraced Catholicism as an adult, very much because of the Church’s teachings on marriage—which I did not know growing up, and which I saw was very different from Protestant views.

And yet, the damage lingers. I believe that since the beginning of my own marriage, I have been “testing” its permanency, and I think it actually started on our honeymoon. I have been playing, “I’ll leave you before you leave me,” or “I’ll keep you at a distance so you can’t hurt me” for most of my life. Certainly into my adult life, I have been afraid to make myself really, deeply vulnerable, and I have neglected to treat with care the vulnerabilities of others. Either would risk a closeness to others that I have avoided. And that has included my wife and our own children.

That has all begun to change in the past few years, but it really wrought havoc with my marriage and my relationships with my kids. [58]

Has my parents’ divorce affected my own view of marriage? No. But it has affected my view of divorce. It is not an option, period. Short of actual danger, it is not an option. And trust me, I’ve been tested. [28]

My parents divorced at the same time I was getting married, a marriage that also ended in divorce. I wonder if I’d have gotten married at all if I weren’t so eager to be away from them. I don’t know if it was their divorce itself that had such a powerful impact on my own failed marriage—or the lack of love, the anger, the fear, and the mistrust that I’d grown up witnessing.

In some ways, I think my grandparents staying together and sharing their stories had a greater impact on me. I believed marriages could work out. They were my role models. I believed anything could be overcome. I ignored warning signs and hoped for the best.

Looking back, I guess my mom probably did the same. I think both of us believed we could make our marriages work. Both of us ignored the free will of the other partner. Both of us thought that if we just tried harder...

I wish I'd had that male role model in my home. I wish I'd had someone to talk to me about what is really important in a man and a father—and that being a good athlete isn't really one of those traits. I wish someone had talked to me about compassion and follow-through. I remember going through Pre-Cana classes and my husband blowing off the questions we were asked; I was hurt by his lack of concern. I wish someone had spoken to me about how important those questions were, and I wish I'd realized that if he blew off something I felt was that important before we were married, he'd probably do it later, too. And it would hurt even more. I wish someone had told me that I was not so special that I could change him, but that I was special enough to seek more than him. Instead, I mirrored many of my mom's mistakes and her beliefs. [14]

Marriage seems impossible. I desire it, but I fear it. On the other hand, my desire to avoid hurting my future children is exceptionally strong. I do not want them to know the pain I have known. [51]

When I was a kid, I asked my dad why he and my mom got divorced. He said something like "Oh, we argued about silly things, like who gets to use more of the blanket in bed and that sort of thing." I accepted that at the time, but as I got older, I realized his answer could mean one of two things:

(1) People can get divorced over something as trivial as a blanket.

OR

(2) He didn't care about me enough to tell me the truth.

I tend to believe (1), which means:

- My husband might leave me because I'm always so behind on laundry.

- My husband might leave me because I forgot to pack a lunch for him all week. (Note: He doesn't ask or expect this; I just do it because I like to. Still, I think if I don't go out of my way, he's outta here.)

- My husband might leave me because I suffer with depression and, while I'm usually able to manage it, there are times that get pretty negative.

- My kids will be damaged by me.

- My kids will remember that "one thing" I said out of anger or sadness, and it will scar them forever.

- My kids will grow up well despite anything I have done, not because of it.

Basically, I feel as if I could lose my husband's love for something trivial. [29]

I was married before and it did not work out. I was not as close to the Lord then and gave up easily. I am presently married 25 years to my husband. We went through a very tough time after 15 years, but, because God has been the center of our life, we made it work. I truly believe that because both of us are Catholic and we sought the sacraments and our faith, we were able to overcome that difficult time that could have ended in divorce. Yes, I would say that my parents' divorce has affected my view of marriage, but in a positive way. It has taught me what to look for and strive for in a marriage. [36]

For most of my life, I accepted divorce as an option for when things didn't work out. I mean seriously, look at what society was telling us—over one-half of all marriages were ending in divorce. I developed a casual attitude towards marriage. Don't get me wrong—I did see good marriages that lasted lifetimes, but those were beginning to feel like the exception rather than the rule. My life in the military taught me that in the grand scheme of things, divorce was a perfectly

acceptable answer to when things didn't work out. Rather than work things out, I saw people just get out. All of this was with a lack of any understanding of what marriage truly is, other than being what two people did who wanted to be together. [52]

My parents' divorce initially made me paranoid about having kids and not being able to stay at home to raise them full time. I had to be in daycare while my mom worked long hours, and it was very isolating for me. I was miserable for years. Because of that, I felt that my husband and I had to be in a certain financial position to justify having kids. So, by the time we were Catholic and understood the Church's teaching, it wasn't happening due to infertility. I may have missed the chance to have children because of that fear. [39]

We have been married for 19 years, and the beginning of our marriage was very difficult. As soon as I got married, I was sure my husband would cheat. I thought unless I could keep him perfectly happy, he would leave me. It seems bizarre to me today, because he is such a good man, but it was really an honest fear. This led to so many fights, and I became so insecure and unhappy. [50]

It made my really want to do marriage prep; I wanted to be sure this was the man I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. We also waited a long while to get engaged, as we wanted to make sure we weren't jumping into anything too early (my parents married young, and that's probably why I didn't get married till I was 31). My husband and I really, truly try not to go to bed mad. I can think of only one time that I did. I remember days/weeks that my parents argued, not directly in front of us, but we could hear it when we were in bed. [10]

I dreamed of having the perfect marriage and happy family that I didn't have growing up. However, I was too emotionally wounded to be an adequate marriage partner. I had the unreal expectations that a husband and children would make me happy. It was obvious that I was

insecure and emotionally needy, so I did not attract the type of man who would be drawn to a self-confident woman. The kind of guys I attracted were either insecure themselves or took advantage of my vulnerability. I married a man who was insecure himself, coming from a very dysfunctional home, though not a broken home.

My parents were married for 30 years, and my dad was very patient. Since there was no remarriage, and since I had had some Catholic schooling, I did view marriage as a lifelong commitment. [45]

It hasn't affected my own view of marriage, as I was already married when my parents divorced, but my siblings weren't yet married when it happened, and I know it has affected theirs. My husband and I have half-joked that if we applied the same excuses to our marriage, we could probably get an annulment, too. My husband's mother has already had two annulments. In a way, how the Church hands out annulments feels like another betrayal. I think this is an American problem. [53]

My parents' relationship and divorce make me think that a good marriage is something that happens in a book or Theology of the Body. Like, it's a good idea and it's out there, but not for me. Their divorce wasn't the only thing that influenced this, though. I was exposed to pornography at a young age and had sex way too young and outside the bonds of marriage. All of those things definitely shaped me. And I think it was partly because my parents were not paying that much attention, or that they lacked the love and sacrifice for each other that would have produced a loving home. They were selfish in many ways, which led to a poor relationship, which led to divorce—and I am angry that they didn't work on it. And I'm repeating it in many ways. Well, I'm fighting *not* to repeat it, but am very unhappy, always struggling. I am always tempted to think that this "staying together" business is ridiculous.

I was reading a Laura Ingalls Wilder story about when Laura disobeyed her father and her conscience was so pricked that she

confessed, and her father gave her a natural consequence: “You can’t be trusted and now must be watched.” I weep at the stories of patience and sacrifice like this—where Ma and Pa were on the same page, and Ma softened the blow, and Laura was able to clear her conscience. I didn’t have that, and I fail so much by not giving my children what I don’t have (but want). So divorce in itself is bad, but the many, many steps it took to get there, the selfishness, the lack of sacrifice... divorce is just the end. Jesus on the Cross makes me weep, too. Movies and books about sacrifice make me weep. The sorrow comes from a place where I don’t think I’m good enough to deserve it. I know that my relationship with Jesus—where I will find everything I need—should be fostered. But it is really hard to get to. It’s a place where I am not, and I have little experience of how to get there. [23]

I don’t think my parents’ divorce has done much to influence my view of marriage, except to point out, starkly, how not to be a spouse. However, the practical aspects of my parents’ divorce (and the divorce of my wife’s parents, too) affects our marriage, specifically in the doubling of the amount of time we have to make available for family, since there are now four, instead of two, sets of “grandparents.” [12]

My family thought it would be a very good idea to postpone my marriage, to “make sure” he was The One, to wait to be financially stable and avoid those worries. I adopted some of that thinking. Ironically, my family liked my husband before I did. [19]

As far as marriage for the children of divorce, I feel that if a spouse is patient and understanding, much can be overcome. But people have to be completely honest with their potential future spouse in regards to any difficulties that may set them up for challenges—of course, that’s not exclusive to children of divorce, but it should be mandated, if such a thing could be! I think marriage can be wonderful, but it’s not easy. In all honesty, I don’t think I would have done it if I knew how hard it would be. [8]

My chaotic upbringing, including my lack of having a real home and a single family, made me very vulnerable to the promise of stability and permanence offered by the cult my family was involved in. So yes, it affected my view of marriage deeply, but as I mentioned before, the remarriages were harder than the divorce. I think I could have managed their divorce okay, assuming they had stayed living close together and not gotten involved in new relationships until I was grown. [26]

It is a catch-22. I am so desperate not to get a divorce that I put up with stuff I really shouldn't put up with. My husband and I really do not communicate well at all; we come from different generations, different countries, and have different personalities. He's phlegmatic; I'm choleric. His begetting sin is superbia; mine is luxuria (think C. S. Lewis' *The Pilgrim's Regress*). His love language is actions of service and mine is words of affirmation, but I am very forgetful and disorganized about my actions, and he is very cutting with his words. It's an impossible situation. If I stay, it hurts and it's hard. If I leave, I put the burden on the children. [4]

I'm sure it did. I came to Christ about 20 years ago and to the Catholic Church (yay!) earlier this year. My Christian life has included a lot of re-education, including learning about what marriage is meant to be. I am so, so grateful that my husband and I, as Christians and now Catholic Christians, have always had the security of knowing that divorce is not an option. I try hard to be a mature, self-giving, non-resentful wife. I think the hardest thing is not having a positive role model—that my default mode is to imitate my mother (and stepmother). Again, I'm grateful that I can do things differently in many ways, but it's an uphill trudge, often. [21]

It has made me *very* determined to have a God-filled relationship with my husband and to *always* think of how my children will be affected by everything I do. I will *never* divorce. Unless there is some

type of serious abuse going on, divorce is selfish. I can think of no better word to describe it. I have a wonderful marriage, and I think I owe a large part of that to my parents' divorce, as I will *not* make the same mistake.

It has not always been that way. For the first few years of my marriage, I was very on-guard and prepared for my husband to leave. In fact, I expected it—even though I knew he was a devout Catholic, I just thought that was what men did and that he would probably eventually decide to leave, even if it meant he'd be alone for the rest of his life. So, I would stash away money, hiding it in a drawer or my purse. I occasionally looked at the cost of efficiency or one-bedroom apartments; I would think about how things would be split up when he left. It wasn't that I wanted him to leave, but in my mind it wasn't even a question of *if* it would happen, but *when* it would happen. I didn't even realize at the time why I did those things, but now I know.

I fell further into a state of despair once we had our first child. I knew my husband loved me with all his heart, but I also knew that was how my dad and stepdad had felt about my mom—yet, it didn't stop them from leaving. So, I would always think about how I would take care of my child on my own, how custody would work, and what would happen if he didn't want to keep in contact with the child. If he did want contact, I wondered if I'd be able to stay close for my kid's sake and not be in terrible emotional pain the entire time. It took many years for me to get past those feelings, but here we are, 24 years and ten children later. We have surpassed the length of both of my mom's marriages combined, and the thought of my husband leaving now never crosses my mind; however, I still remember when it consumed my every thought. [59]

It has made me work extra hard on our marriage, to make it work, and to keep God and our faith life at the center of our marriage. My husband and I are always looking for ways to grow in the spiritual side of our marriage, by going to confession, going to Eucharistic adoration twice a month, and purchasing books or CDs that help us learn more



about the sacrament of matrimony. All of this helps us to remember that even when we're in the daily grind of things, our marriage is living, breathing, and growing when God is at the center. He is growing us and sanctifying us, both in the mundane seasons and in the very difficult and busy seasons.

We've also made a commitment of transparency with each other when it comes to saying "yes" to activities. We make sure to discern together each new outside commitment, wanting to make sure we're still making time for each other, and that our absence doesn't create too much stress on our marriage and family life. My parents' divorce taught me that we should be saving the majority of our "yesses" for God, each other, and our family. If we pour out too much of ourselves to the outside world, we have nothing left to offer God and our spouse. [49]

It's probably made me an even stronger believer in traditional marriage—till death do us part—than I might have been otherwise. [32]

Their divorce profoundly affected me and my view of all that marriage actually entails. The destruction of so much that is so valuable was a wake-up call to make a firm commitment and to respect marriage as a bedrock of the future. With marriage, strong purposeful end goals are seen, marked, and achieved. There is no teamwork like marriage. It is the greatest, most successful teamwork in all of mankind's existence, outside of commitment to Christ. [47]

I know I don't want my marriage to be anything like theirs was. [6]

Without a doubt. I knew in the deepest place in my heart that I had to wait. I had to wait until I knew I was ready to be married and wanted a family. That said—I made many, many mistakes along the way, including buying into this culture's idea that you must be "settled" to have a child. Because of my parents' bad example and God's grace, I

am married to my best friend and mother to our amazing children.  
[68]

It has profoundly affected my own marriage and my view of marriage. I purposely sought a devout Catholic spouse who felt as strongly as I did about the indissolubility of a sacramental marriage. Once I got past my fear of being abandoned, I had a whole host of other issues to begin working on. I needed to learn how to fight fair (still working on that one), how to listen to my spouse, how to negotiate and accept that we didn't have to think the same way and agree on everything...the list goes on. Thank God for good Catholic marriage counselors, as my husband and I have been able to keep trudging the road to happy, holy destiny together! [63]

My parents' separation has made me a little nervous about marriage. It makes me scared that my future marriage might not work. It makes me worry that I might give up too soon on my own marriage if things get tough. Yet, at the same time, it makes me all the more determined not to let the same thing happen to me and to my marriage, and not to make the same mistakes my mom and dad did. But the determination doesn't get rid of the fear that I will end up making the same mistakes. [22]

Yes, deeply. My own marriage has encountered many unique trials and tribulations as a result of having to navigate my broken family situations as an adult child of divorce. The difference between how my husband was raised and how I was raised is so beyond stark that I find myself protecting him from the dysfunction that I encountered—sometimes simply because of his inability to navigate even the easy parts of it without being horrified. That's not to say that I hide things from him—I don't. It's more a commentary on the fact that what happened in my parents' divorce (and how it specifically involved me) is so opposite his experience that he truly can't understand. I try to reassure him that it's not normal for someone to understand it—

divorce isn't normal. And I try to remind him that it's a measure of how much I love and trust him when I share something about my parents' divorce, as it's not a topic I willingly enter into with many (or even any) people.

It's amazing that everything in my life is divided by the line where my parents separated—with everything on one side or the other. My understanding of life and relationships is different on either side of that line. Marriage requires that I live in the understanding of life and family that I had in childhood before the divorce (i.e., unconditional love taught through actions/words), but without applying knowledge of anything learned after the divorce. Reality demands that my adulthood is and has to be a product of life lessons learned after that divorce. That means all the negative actions and words that taught me the "conditionality" of love were the real fertilizer for marriage...a sacrament that requires the opposite vow from me. I'm not convinced you can ever truly reconcile these things, even if God has already redeemed them.

Make no mistake—my husband and I are happy to navigate things at a snail's pace, to unravel the source of the dysfunction between us and grow something beautiful in its stead. It's a chiseling process (and it feels like it), and we are the spindle being turned. My parents' marriage is merely a dense knot in the wood that resists being chiseled. It's always there, but that doesn't mean we can't chip away at it and polish it...but we know it impacts every revolution. Nothing is simple because of that. It requires us to make our own tools, because the normal ones don't work. [69]

My parents' divorce has not had any impact on my relationship with my husband. My marriage is very good. The only disturbing thing that happens to me are the dreams I have of my husband leaving me. I haven't had one in a while, but I have had many. Fear of abandonment is real. [31]

Yes... Since my parents' divorce was happening right as I was getting ready for marriage, I went into my engagement subconsciously thinking that divorce was probable, if not inevitable. Thanks to a great marriage prep program (Catholic marriage prep needs to be very strong to help combat divorce and cultural marriage fallacies), I was confronted with two important realizations: 1) I had not forgiven my mother for her emotional abuse, and I still held a grudge against both of my parents for divorcing, and 2) divorce was not inevitable; it was fully within the control of my fiancé and me to take divorce off the table.

That pre-marriage retreat hit me like a ton of bricks. Thanks to my fantastic fiancé's support, I made the decision to stop wedding prep for three months and focus on marriage prep instead. I was not doubtful of my spouse-to-be at all. I doubted *me* and the emotional baggage I was bringing into marriage. It was because I was so sure of *him* that I knew I had to be the best possible *me* before getting married—so that I could give myself completely to him “freely and without reservation” in Holy Matrimony. So, for three months, I met with a great Catholic psychologist, went on silent retreat, and prayed a whole lot. It made a world of difference. That journey to self-improvement and relying on God instead of people like my parents for my self-worth is a continual process, but recognizing and confronting that issue before marriage was *huge!*

Marriage, for me, by the way, is awesome, thanks be to God! It is not perfect, but it is truly, truly blessed and joyful, even amidst any sorrow and trials. [30]

I think my parents' divorce has made me both less secure and a lot more hard-working in my own marriage. I have it in the back of my mind that things could all go wrong at any moment, and then I'd be on my own or a single mother. I feel like I have to be as independent as I can possibly be “just in case.” It has made it more difficult for me to trust and even think long-term. But I so desperately want a stable

family that I try very hard to make things work. I think sometimes I have put up with more than I should, just to keep the peace.

It has definitely kept me from having as many kids as I probably would have had. I love my kid and husband, but, in the event of a divorce, I would not want to put multiple kids through what I went through or find myself unable to work and provide for myself. My mom lacked job skills and was financially dependent on my dad both before and after the divorce. I learned that I have to be able to take care of myself no matter what, because I might otherwise be homeless! [54]

My poor husband has had to endure my health issues and watching me suffer. He has seen all the ugliness in my family and the demise of my parents' marriage. Because he has always placed Jesus first, I know he will never leave me, and we are happy, but I wonder how much happier he and our marriage would be if all of this had never happened. He suffered watching me suffer. [70]

Yes it has. Until my conversion I simply did not believe marriage was sustainable. I was taught (and believed) that it was an old-fashioned institution that did not allow for people to develop into who they were "supposed" to be, and that it strangled their potential happiness. Overcoming that view was difficult. [67]

I struggle with trusting my husband. I am always waiting for the other shoe to drop, which I am sure must be related to the feeling of abandonment by my family of origin. On the other hand, I feel that I guard my marriage more, in order to save my children from having to endure the pain that I did. [65]

Cynicism. I struggle with viewing marriage cynically. There was a time that we would help with engaged couples at our parish. I eventually had to stop. When you get to the point where you just want to tell engaged couples to flee and run for the hills, you know it's time to stop. I felt like the biggest hypocrite. There I was, talking about the

beauty and unity of marriage, when I had just had a fight that morning with my husband. I spoke poetically about complete self-giving and forgiveness, all the while hating my husband and withdrawing into my shell. [13]

Yes, my parents' divorce *did* affect my view of marriage, but it does *not* anymore. Early in our marriage, I packed my stuff to go stay at a hotel for the night. I had watched my mother do this plenty of times during distress in her marriage. When I got to the door, my husband was standing in front of it and blocked it. He said, "You're not going anywhere. This is marriage. Get used to it." From that day forward, not only did he earn my respect, but I felt so loved that he wanted me *there* with him, even if we were fighting. My husband changed the course of our marriage that evening. [1]

Yes. I married young and divorced within a couple years. I never felt like I could or should be alone, and I latched onto any man who would have me. This is classic abandonment-issue stuff. It is easy to want to give up and walk away when life gets hard. But now that I am remarried and have the graces of the Church attached to my marriage, I am hopeful it will be stable and forever. [66]

My view of marriage was skewed for a long time. Being a sensitive girl and at a tender age when my parents divorced, I did not handle it well. I tried to sabotage my own marriage often. I constantly wanted to give up. When I did want to give up, I asked God to change my perspective. Within 24 hours, He would (and still does)! Also, I'd hear a voice that said, "You have not tried everything until you've prayed the rosary." [20]

I think initially their divorce convinced me that I would never put a child through what I went through. But now that I understand the beautiful teaching of the Catholic Church and the sanctity of marriage,

my view of marriage is impacted more by Truth than by my own experience. [33]

*Yessss!!!* My husband pays for the mistakes of my father every time I'm feeling insecure. Every time a comment comes out of my mouth from a place of jealousy or insecurity that stems from my father's mistakes, my husband suffers. My inability to believe my husband when he says that he loves me or thinks I'm beautiful is from my parents' divorce, because if I or my mother had been enough of those things for my father, wouldn't he have stayed? When my husband and I were engaged and going through marriage prep, I remember being in disbelief that our marriage would even happen. I remember thinking, *He is too good to be true! This upcoming marriage is too good to be true!* I felt as if I didn't deserve something as amazing as marrying my husband.

I feel undeserving of a good marriage, and at times I resort to destructive words and actions in my marriage because of that. [44]

My parents' divorce affects my own marriage only in allowing us to talk about it in a realistic light. It's like when a member of one's close family dies. Every death can evoke feelings of sadness or sympathy. The ones not directly related to the deceased are more easily able to move on. A death in the immediate family, however, is all-consuming; the grief is strong and lasts indefinitely. So it is with divorce. The discussions my husband and I have allow us to delve into our faith together, solidify what we believe in as husband and wife in a God-centered marriage, and figure out a way to lovingly, yet truthfully, explain it all to our children. [56]

I vividly remember repeating the vow...“for better or worse, in sickness and health, until death do us part.” It was the only vow I've ever taken, and I meant it. *I meant it.* I was marrying for life. There was nothing, *nothing* that would change that. And nothing ever will. My marriage is the single most important thing in my life. Sometimes to my detriment, I will admit. I probably don't have the healthiest

conflict-resolution skills. I fear, more than anything, abandonment. It's an irrational fear. My husband is a saint—really he is. He has been patient and loving in my insecurity. I do still fear, after 32 years of marriage, that he will leave. I sometimes despair to the point of suicidal thoughts, feeling I am unworthy of love. I ask him constantly if he is mad or if he still loves me. Don't get me wrong, our marriage and our family (four daughters and one son) is wonderfully happy and healthy. I do have those dark times; however, through prayer, supplication, and agony, I unite those times with those who are on the brink of suicide...these are agonizing moments. I know I've stepped in the gap for some other despairing soul, so it's worth the suffering.

There have been many divorces around our marriage, and some of them have affected me in such a terrifying way. These are Catholic marriages. One couple who split was our closest "couple" friends, godparents to our fourth daughter. That one set me on a path away from the Church for about a year, maybe two. We stopped going to Mass, and I had my foundation shaken. But we made our way back, due to the prayers and love of our friends, most especially my daughter's godmother, the one who had been left by her husband. Her unwavering faith helped bring me home. [42]

I was an adult when the divorce happened, and it has not changed my view on marriage. Military marriages are hard when your husband is gone nine months out of the year. My mom was very committed to that season of her marriage and life. She was less committed once he was retired and home, I guess. I always knew my marriage to my wife was different from theirs, and I never used their marriage as a role model for me. Both people have to be just as committed as the other to the marriage. The breakdown starts when someone selfishly chooses to make something else more important. Both of my parents could not or would not choose their marriage over their own mental health issues (Dad: unaffectionate, unable to demonstrate proper love and emotion, lost in books and politics) or longing for a more fulfilling partner (Mom: tired of being the decision-maker, desiring to travel and do fun



things). Everyone is told by the culture to do what makes them happy, damn everyone else. So that is how they treated their marriage, I guess. [38]

Going into my marriage, I had a strong resolve not to be “stupid” like my parents were. But the truth was, I had only selfish, flawed parents as my models of marriage, so when my husband and I experienced difficulties (like every married couple will), one of my first instincts was to “peace out.” I believe my parents’ divorce made it very difficult to trust that my marriage could withstand great challenges. [43]

I think that, in a way, it has made me even more stubborn about staying together through difficulties. When my parents separated, we had just been through our marriage retreat, with the strong message that “love is a decision,” so I was very hurt by my mother’s declaration that she “hadn’t been happy in a long time.” I think of that at times when I am not feeling happy in my own marriage. [7]

Yes, their divorce has affected my own marriage, as I am keenly aware of the need to communicate with and love my husband actively, even when it’s hard. [61]

I have always known what marriage is on a basic level, and, as I have been in formation for the priesthood, I’ve learned more of what God created marriage to be. My mother said it best several years ago when I was a novice: “I realize that our marriage failed because we didn’t let God be a part of it.” Their divorce has never changed my views, but it has given me an experience that aids me in my ministry to others, specifically those who are going through or have been through divorce and difficult marriages. [24]

Just getting married was a challenge, in spite of me highly valuing and yearning for marriage and family life. Once I got married, I

thankfully had worked through a lot, thanks to a very good marriage preparer who was wise enough to acknowledge the wounds caused by my parents' divorce (and who knew the wounds would be lifelong even if they didn't debilitate me!). I spent the first year accepting that I had made a commitment, but struggling to adjust to it. It was a rough first year.

In subsequent years, I've enjoyed a good marriage, but there are times when I have struggled for lack of a blueprint. I just never saw my mom and dad do life together, day to day. I found myself at times functioning more like a single mom, trying to remind myself to fit my husband in! I also noticed how I struggled to connect to my father-in-law; I would catch myself referring to my in-laws' house as my husband's mom's house...isn't that weird?! I began to realize I never had related to my biological parents as a unit.

Being married has also given me insights into marriage that only raise further questions about my parents' divorce. And it is a weird experience, 30 years down the road, to realize that your father barely knows your mother at this point, when you see the unity of your still-married in-laws (and all the good ripple effects of their intact marriage). I've had to continue to overcome a fear of turning into my dad, since once again, he is a good person—a person with whom I share most of my personality traits and whom I often admire—but also a person who, perplexingly, could not make his marriage with another good person work. [40]

Yes. We did things completely differently than our parents did (my husband is from a divorced family as well). My husband and I made the choice to make our marriage work, because children deserve a mother and a father. Praise God we weren't dictated by our feelings, as those changed quite often. [27]

The one thing I will definitely say about how divorce affected my marriage (my husband is also a child of divorce) is that we both said we would do anything to stay married. Believe me—and I will not go into

detail to protect my husband—we absolutely were on the road to divorce. The only reason it didn't happen is because something so drastic happened to my husband, that it changed him for the good forever! I thank God every day for that because we truly were living in hell. [41]

Now, I am a little shy about marriage. I would love to be married, but, because of how their marriage fell apart, it makes me a little wary of marriage, even though I know what a blessing it is. [35]

As I mentioned, I'm divorced. I married someone who was physically abusive (even before walking down the aisle). I didn't have a model of a good relationship. As a kid, I remember being excited, on some level, to hear Mom and Dad fight, listening at the heater vent, heart racing, wondering what was going to happen. That's when I saw them paying attention to each other—the rest of the time there was silence. [46]

When I got married, I knew it was for life, period. I was and am completely committed to being a different man than my father. My wife and I are both totally committed to our marriage. [3]

When I married, I was determined to make my marriage work, and I never believed that I would ever get divorced. I was completely shocked when my husband asked for a divorce. I still very much believe in marriage and believe that it is a holy union between a man and woman. [17]

Has it affected my own view of marriage? I really don't know. Probably. I have a very hard time with communication. I do view marriage in general as a positive thing though, but I attribute that realization to the grace of God. [60]

My wife and I are Catholics who constantly are trying to do better. Although we are not perfect, we struggle and continue to grow together. We both come from divorced families, so divorce is not an option. We want a better future for our kids. We have a lot of challenges with intimacy, and I believe this is due to our mutual lack of role models for a strong marriage. [34]

My parents' divorce has definitely affected my view of marriage. I want to believe so badly that marriages work out and last forever, that I can have the "storybook ending" where I can live happily ever after. But I have seen that that just doesn't happen. Someone whom I regard as a teacher and counselor told me at the end of my senior year of high school that he heard somewhere that divorce affects seven generations, and to let him know how that works out. How would that make anyone feel? Not only will my parents' divorce affect me, but possibly six more generations after me? I was horrified, and that idea haunts me. [37]

Before my reversion back to the Church, I looked at my marriage as something that was totally disposable. If things started going in a direction I did not like, I could always divorce him. After all, my parents did, and my siblings and I "survived." But the problem with that is that "surviving" is not the way we should see our childhood. I did leave my husband once for a year. And by the grace of God, we got back together...I am so grateful for that. My children witnessed the power of God in our marriage when we had our marriage validated in the Church. My children saw resurrection—a powerful message of what God can do when you allow Him. [64]

Yes—in fact, that's probably why my husband and I are still together. There have been some very, very difficult times in our relationship—times when I was on the verge of walking away. But in the end, I couldn't do that to my kids. I couldn't subject them to the pain I went through myself. So instead, we went through the more

difficult path and worked on our problems. Is our marriage perfect now? Of course not, and it never will be, because we are imperfect humans. But we are stronger now than we ever were before. [25]



## Chapter Four

# Are Children Resilient?

*“What do you want to say to people who say that ‘children are resilient’ and ‘kids are happy when their parents are happy’ and ‘kids of divorce will be just fine and will go on to live successful lives?’”*

Divorce is simply a bloodless form of child sacrifice, nothing more, nothing less. My grandparents’ generation had to deal with a lot—war, undiagnosed PTSD, and alcoholism—but they had a noble idea: That you sacrificed your own happiness for your children's well-being. You took on all of the heartache so that they didn't have to. Certainly bad marriages also hurt children of that era, but at least they had a noble concept of selflessness at the heart of family life.

My parents’ generation inverted that. They decided that it was better a child should have her world torn apart than an adult should bear any suffering. Of course, they didn't frame it that way. They believed that the child would suffer less, because the children were just extensions of the mother, and the mother was theoretically happier (though mine wasn't, not really). But the truth is, when I was a child my mother's happiness was on the periphery of my awareness. Children have a life and a thought process that is all their own, but the world their parents build for them is truly the only universe they know. Children aren't experienced enough to realize how big and varied reality is, as they live in a small circle of relationships and

reliable outcomes. Ideally, their universe expands slowly as they get older, and they can better cope with the unexpected. What divorce does is shatter that universe in a drastic and traumatic way, and there's no coming back from that. It even changes the way you perceive reality—you become anxious, nothing ever feels safe or predictable, and you're always waiting for the piano to fall. [4]

There aren't vulgarities strong enough to express my hatred and disdain for these notions. I have holes that will never be filled this side of Heaven. [51]

I was not resilient. But I didn't know that. I didn't recognize the gaping vacuum I tried to fill throughout my teen years. It's only now, in retrospect, that I see how all my destructive choices were the result of craving family while at the same time fearing the fragility of family. I regret the poor choices I made. I mourn the murder of my unborn babies. I didn't know. I didn't realize. My family doesn't know about this. They don't need to. It is not their burden to bear. I recently told my husband that I don't have one truly joyful family memory from my childhood. I had fun times of course, but I do not have one, meaningful, happy, secure family memory. Not. One. [42]

I want to scream when I hear "children are resilient." Children are trying to survive. After the divorce, one of my sisters was old enough to run away to my mother's house (my abusive father had custody), and my brother did the same not long after my sister. I ended up taking on a protector role for my little sisters, and I tried to be gone as much as possible. I developed coping skills.

Children learn to adapt, but I always felt deformed, different from the kids who came from "regular" homes. I felt unloved and unlovable. Children from divorce are trying to see where they fit in among all the wreckage and dysfunction, trying so hard to make sense of who they are. It may look like they are functioning just fine, but on the inside they are dying. Their self-confidence is forever changed. If you were to



look at the outcome for my siblings, there are mental disorders, multiple divorces, one sister's daughter who committed suicide (her other children hate her), drug addictions, AIDS, felonies, and imprisonment. And that's just for starters. So, yes, we siblings survived, but with serious collateral damage.

What is "resilience" anyway? Is it likened to a rubber trash can—something that can be dragged, thrown, crushed, and left outside to hold the stench? [64]

Children survive abuse, poverty, starvation. That doesn't mean we should purposely inflict such things on them. I grew up in a generation of children whose parents were divorced. I dated from that pool, and the hidden wounds made relationships difficult and often dysfunctional. Moving forward to marriage was certainly complicated. [53]

Ah...the ol' "kids are resilient" and "kids are happy when their parents are happy" and "kids can go on to live happy successful lives." Yes, I've heard. I can tell you that, like most lies, there is a grain of truth in each statement. From all outward appearances, I am an awesome example of a child of divorce who did well. I'm married to the same man for 23 years, I appear to have raised and continue to raise wonderful, happy children, and I live in a decent home in a decent neighborhood, without drama. But that's not how you really measure a life, is it? You can't see struggles that are kept behind the scenes. You don't see years and years of tears in the night from a sad and lonely marriage. If I believed with any ounce of sincerity that kids are fine after divorce, I'd have been divorced 17 years ago. Yes, kids may be resilient, but do they deserve brokenness? Do they deserve division? Do they deserve visitations and custody agreements and holidays straddled and tugged between parents and grandparents? I hear people say, "I'd die for my kids," and I always wonder if they'd be willing to live for them. Because I can say that living for them, in my experience, is really hard. It is hard to persevere for the sake of others.

I have a dear friend who left her husband, and we were together one evening, and someone asked how her ex was doing. She said that he was actually doing really well. She said, "Of course, he's still an ass, but I don't have to deal with him anymore! The kids do, but I don't." And I thought, *wow*. Here she is saying it out loud, and still none of the other women in the conversation seemed to hear it the way I did. It seemed so clear to me that we're all asses in one way or another, and one of the roles of being a parent is to help your kids to interact well with the other parent, not leave them and let them try to figure out how to deal with an ass of a father.

It was that very same night that another one of the ladies informed the group that she was leaving her husband. She announced that she was a good mother and did not want to be judged. All of the women were supportive, affirming her, and being so kind to her. I was silent, because her words were directed at me. She had told me about the separation a couple of days earlier, and I did the unexpected: I said that I loved her and her husband and that I would pray that somehow things could be resolved for the good of her kids and the unity of the family. That was too much judgment. So in that room with the other women, I knew I was being reprimanded; I felt about the size of a grain of rice.

The conversation turned to how divorce affects the children, and immediately the same old lines were trotted out: The amazing resilience of kids, the idea that the happiness of the parents is crucial to kids' happiness, etc. And I listened as they all went on and on. I was silent, because I knew that she found my opinion to be hurtful, and I had already said privately what I felt obliged to say.

What struck me, though, was that this group of eight Catholic women spoke with such authority, though they all came from intact homes. They said what was expected, what our friend wanted to hear. And that's how we do it; we give support instead of giving pushback—the aunt who commiserates and then encourages outrageous actions in an emotional moment, the girlfriends who will support a friend

because that's what we do as women. To not go along is to judge and to be critical, and who wants to be that?

So I sat there in silence, because I realized that nobody was about to ask the one person in the room who had any direct experience with what it's really like being a kid going through divorce. No. We don't really want to get real. That's not what we do. [28]

They're lying to themselves. The kids may grow up to be successful, like I did, but the psychological damage will always occur in the child. It just will. You can't tear up a child's foundation of security (which is their parents' marriage) and expect them to be fine. They will always have those wounds and scars they'll have to deal with. Maybe they'll be able to cope well with it, but, the fact is, they *will* have something to cope with that a child from an intact family will not. [57]

Maybe you think that parents being happy will make their kids happy, but when divorce occurs, someone does the leaving. It is not usually a congenial mutual decision. My mother cried her eyes out and fell apart when my father left her. And she tried to maintain this huge secret of not letting the world know that he had walked out. Happy? My dad might have been happy, but nobody else was. Same when he left my stepmother. She was destroyed and my siblings were destroyed. Did we pull ourselves back together? I guess reasonably so, but I have had nightmares almost my entire life—I have suffered from migraines since I was nine years old, and as an adult I have been diagnosed with PTSD, anxiety/panic attacks, and severe clinical depression. The divorce essentially removed a protective parent from my life, and I was abused from age three until I was 18. That plays into my emotional dynamics—I behaved like the perfect child, easily subdued and intimidated. All of that damage was exacerbated when my own husband walked out. [18]

Those are platitudes to assuage guilty consciences. Kids can be resilient. My little sister was resilient; she is a successful adult.

Divorced parents are all she has ever really known. But, as I said earlier, I have seen the opposite. [3]

I remember when my mom said that she and my dad had important news to tell my sisters and me, and she said not to worry, that nobody was sick, and that everything was going to be okay. Married couples with children who are considering divorce need to be told that it's not going to be okay. They are going to affect their lives, their kids' lives, and their grandkids' lives forever. [48]

As children of divorce, we may go on to be happy and to have good marriages, but the effect of that broken marriage on our own children (our parents' grandchildren) is a different story. In our case, we have to try to explain to our kids why their grandma is living with a man she's not married to—and how she justifies that, even as it goes against the very Faith in which she raised us, choices my wife and I don't agree with.

My mother's happiness has not led to her children's happiness. She introduced a man into our lives who wouldn't let our kids call him "Grandpa" because he "wasn't ready" to be a grandpa. They tried to blend the families but then stopped trying, and who knows why. There is a constant ebb and flow of people in your life that you are supposed to "love" because they are now family—but then they're not, because they're not technically married. And they've decided it's too hard to get us all together, so we no longer see them.

With Dad's second divorce, these people fell off the face of the earth. He had stopped talking to us for about six years as he immersed himself into the lives of his new wife's family. Then when she left, her kids no longer talked to my dad or helped him in any way, even though he had been more of a dad to them than he had been to me in years. People have become very disposable in this culture. [38]

I completely disagree. Yes, we may go on to live successful lives, but with a lot of baggage. For me personally, that means a past that still

haunts me to this day—abuse, suicide attempt, cutting, major depression, promiscuity, my own divorce, etc. A lot of that would have been avoided had my parents just stayed together from the get-go. Divorce is such a trauma, and so many kids are expected to be okay, since it's so “normal.” But it makes me so sad. [66]

Those who would say that children of divorce are resilient? If they are therapeutic professionals or religious leaders, I wish they would be disciplined for leading parents astray. Let me explain what I mean.

When therapists and clergy present a false idea to parents of what children need and are owed according to divine and natural law, they are complicit in the pain and anguish that these kids struggle with, often permanently. By offering such advice, they imply to parents that they are familiar with all the relevant social science data; however, the data is clear that kids are not resilient about these matters. Therefore, I believe that they are acting outside the bounds of their professional competence. What is the normal course of action when professionals and religious authorities display incompetence, and the incompetence harms others? In principle, they need to be corrected by their governing bodies or superiors. So when I say that I wish they would be disciplined, that is what I mean.

But since the governing bodies of secular professional fields—and even some religious institutions—seem to be compromised on all of the sexual issues, I am not sure what it will take for such professionals to stop perpetuating falsehoods about children and what is owed to those children according to divine and natural law. Children are owed more than a roof over their heads and timely child-support payments—and parents being happy about their love-lives and sexual activity is not part of what is owed to children. There will eventually be an accounting, and it would be better for all of us if it happened in this life rather than the next. [26]

It's complete B.S. This is an extreme exaggeration, but it reminds me of the people who say, “It's okay; it's not really a person yet,” to

mothers considering abortion. That advice seems compassionate, *but it hurts people*. Again, this is not a perfect analogy (because while some civil divorces need to happen for the sake of personal safety, there is never a licit reason to have an abortion), but I hope you can understand my comparison anyway. [29]

No! Children say what they think you want to hear, because when they don't get you full-time, they want your attention! They could possibly hide their pain until they find an outlet, no matter if that outlet is ten years later in the form of sex, alcohol, drugs, or worse. You can never just assume. Kids have it written on their hearts what a good and holy family is supposed to look like, and when you get a divorce, you just scribbled all over their perfect picture. You can't just erase that with some new paper and crayons! [6]

Before I say anything to them, can I slap them around a little first, and let them know that that makes me happy, and so they should be happy, too? No? Okay...

When people say stuff like that, it just makes me think that they say, see, and think what they want to say, see, and think, rather than observing reality. It is so terribly easy to manipulate kids, to make them pay the price for the sins of those who should love, protect, nurture, and care for them. I don't think I'm unusual, and I've often thought, when reading surveys that say how great kids of divorce turn out, that by such a survey, I would look great, too. For example, I have never gotten in trouble with drugs or alcohol; I did well in college and law school and had a fancy career until I left it; I have a good marriage and lovely kids. But the "successes" of school and career were, in part, because I felt the pressure to have it all together, since the rest of my life was so unstable. I think it's probably common for kids of divorce to have to create their own stability, which then reinforces the fact that they cannot trust others to care for them as they should. I hid my own pain and fear for years. I am still trying to figure out who I am and trying to believe that who I am is okay. I know my issues aren't due

only to the divorce—but really, a divorce is (at least sometimes) just another indication of parents who put their own desires ahead of what is right and best for their kids. [21]

The people who say "children are resilient" proceed from an incorrect notion of (1) the human person and the nature and importance of the parent-child relationship, and (2) what marriage is and means. To people who say those things, I would answer that, unless you have divorced parents, you can't possibly know how I feel.

My sister has had a much harder time with the divorce than I have. Certainly not debilitating, but just that she's unable or unwilling to "let it go." My mother will opine to my sister and me that it's time to get over it. I remind her—forcefully—that she had two parents who loved each other dearly. My mother has no idea how I or my sister feel, and she never will. She may know some things better than me by virtue of being older, but she will never know what having divorced parents is like. And so I have little tolerance for being told—by my parents, by the secular culture, by the social "experts"—how I should feel or how I should be. [12]

I'd call it a load of crap, and I wouldn't wish that suffering on any child. Just because children of divorce may seem fine, it does not mean that they are. They probably just don't want to talk or think about it. I would cry myself to sleep or cry alone for hours. [60]

Well, kids are not that resilient. They come out damaged one way or the other, whether they know it or not. The fact is, marriage sometimes sucks...but divorce always sucks. At a minimum, when parents divorce, kids do not see the struggles of marriage and the ways to work out conflict, or the healing of forgiveness between spouses. I believe that the three most important words in marriage are not "I love you," but "I am sorry" and "Please forgive me."

As a man whose own father left, I can speak to the absence of a father, but it's not just about a father's absence. It's also about the effect

of living with a single mom, which, for reasons that infuriate me, is now somehow some kind of lauded status in American lore.

If the father is absent, as he was in my case, it is devastating. It destroys the image of God as a loving Father, which is not just a “Catholic thing,” but a description of reality. In fact, I was an atheist for a time, because I could not believe that God would allow what happened to my family to actually happen. The first time I read the Scripture, “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?” (Matt. 7:9), I thought, “Well, my father would.”

The other devastating effects are more subtle. For instance, at the age of 48, I am still learning authentic masculinity. For one thing, I have had to learn that women (my wife and daughters) are not “one of the guys.” There are things boys can learn from their fathers that are simply not taught in a book or a catechism. They are observed. There is a way men and women ought to interact. There is a way men should interact with other men. Boys don’t learn that when the father is absent. Some of the practical effects I see when juxtaposed against my contemporaries are the benefit of male networks (for instance, when seeking employment). This is lost when there is no father, resulting in real economic damage for years to come, whether one is the son of a laborer or a billionaire.

One effect of the divorce on me is a lack of confidence. I am now beginning to recognize that I really am a talented lawyer; but the thing is, without a father around to affirm abilities, boys don’t develop the confidence they need to develop properly. I also developed a real problem with authority and was an intensely angry person for most of my life, even into adulthood.

I started to develop a real lack of discipline in my teen years and a really bad attachment to pleasure—food, drink, and sex. I thought the object of life was to be rich, eat well, and have a good looking woman draped on your arm...until that ran out. In my twenties, I had some shattering experiences that changed that view, and which ultimately



led me into the Church (a whole other story). But the lack of discipline has plagued me to this day.

Perhaps the most insidious damaging effect is that for most of my married life, I have “tested” my wife in all kinds of passive-aggressive and even outright aggressive ways to see if she would “be around.” There has been this cycle of bad behavior on my part (just generally being a jerk), followed by true contrition, but also wanting to see if she would stay constant. She always did. Now, she did kick me out once..I was allowed back into the house for meals and showers, but I had to sleep in the car. We never divorced, and she has told me she had friends counseling her to do so.

Honestly, the whole thing was bewildering to my wife, but it also was to me. I really did not understand what I was doing. Looking back, I engaged in a similar pattern in other romantic relationships. I deeply regret the harm I have done in my life. [58]

I don't think all of my siblings are resilient. The younger ones were still at home at the time of the divorce and had to shuffle between our parents' houses every weekend. I don't think we are messed up, but it changes perspective on what you want, what you will put up with in a spouse, and it explains why some of my siblings are still single. [10]

We might end up being "just fine" and live "successful lives" by some measure, but it will be in spite of our broken family, not because of it. What is the measure of "just fine" and "successful"? Are dysfunctional adult relationships with parents and step-siblings considered fine or successful? Do we only care about degrees, money, and personal fulfillment? Do we care about our grown children's anxiety or mental health? Do we care about the interwoven fabric of family, relationships, future grandkids, or healthy extended family dynamics? Do we really want to teach our kids to put their own personal happiness above all else, even their future spouse and kids? Is that really the path to happiness for anyone? Sure, God can and does use bad circumstances for good, but why would we want to hand our

children the bad circumstances to begin with if we can help it? I just have a lot of questions for these confident people who say such things.

A lot of ongoing family dysfunction takes root and flourishes from the dysfunction that fueled the divorce. The dysfunction grows and grows over the years until things boil over, or until the adult children just distance themselves over confusion and hurt, afraid to discuss it, especially when step-family members get involved in the picture. If adults don't get this—if they are too busy defending themselves—so much damage is done, and the grandkids suffer from it, too.

My mom has always been peaceful about it even when she was sad about it. Peace, clarity, and focusing on what's best for the kids despite what life throws at you...Those things go a long way for moving forward and maintaining healthy relationships with your kids. [16]

I don't have a good comment here. Everyone has such different experiences. Having your parents divorce at the age of three is so different than 12. *However*, kids do best with *their dad and their mom*—biological parents—in the home. [31]

I would beg such people to not assume such a thing. Being in ministry (I am soon to be ordained a priest), I can tell you that children are resilient in many ways, yes, but children of divorce are “walking wounded.” Kids are indeed happy when their parents are happy, but I can promise that children whose parents are divorcing are not happy, even if both parents, somehow, are finding happiness in the death of their union. Too often it seems to be the case that parents divorce for the sake of their own happiness, and somehow they believe that their happiness will transfer to their children. My siblings and I wanted nothing more than for our parents to reconcile, to find love for one another again. We wanted to be able to step into a single house, into the embrace of both our mother and our father. I am resilient, because I was an adult when that union died. Children are resilient, but does that resilience mean we should therefore afflict them with one of the deepest wounds one could possibly inflict? Those wounds, even if they

heal over into scars, will always—always—have an effect on their future relationships. I see it all the time in ministry and among my friends and family. [24]

I missed my home. I missed the safety and security of family. They're blurry memories now. My brother and I both have had trouble in relationships. We still talk about how messed up it was *for us* for our parents to divorce. I'm 46, and he's 48. [11]

Some children are more resilient than others, but not all. God is the reason for my resilience.

Children are obviously happier when their parents are happy. They are free of a lot of tension and chaos. However, when parents stay married, but there is much tension in the relationship, this has a detrimental effect. The divorce, especially a bitter divorce, adds other layers of problems, one of those being the loss of an ongoing relationship with one of the parents. Another is the child having to pick sides, sometimes being used as an outright pawn in a custody battle.

If the situation of the marriage was bad enough, a divorce (if the child lives with the more stable, loving parent!) can actually be a relief, an improvement to what was a horrible family life. But if the child is sent to live with the wrong parent, it can be even more painful for the child. The courts favor the mother, but she is not always the better parent.

In my case, initially, I lived with my mother. Those were the worst, most lonely years of my life. When I finally moved to my dad's home at age 12, I was so extremely relieved. [45]

I would say yes, children are resilient when they have to be. But is that what you want? For your child to be "resilient" as a result of your decision to divorce your spouse? I think that parents who are considering divorce are really saying, "My child will pick up the slack on this decision." It's just an excuse to make yourself feel better.

I would say yes, kids are “happy when their parents are happy,” but many kids would be *happier* if their parents stayed together. It seems to me that parents would say this as an excuse to justify their actions. The best scenario for a child is two parents, male and female, who love and respect each other and live a holy marriage. Always will be.

As for the “kids of divorce will be just fine” question: That’s a big blanket statement that isn’t true. It’s true for some and not true for others. If it was just a known fact that every single child of divorce grew up fine and lived a successful life, the comment wouldn’t need mentioning. [48]

No matter how resilient and successful children of divorce end up being, they will always carry a terrible, heavy load of grief and sadness. With God's grace they will learn how to manage everything, but these desperately deep-reaching, tragic emotions will never go away. [70]

I want to tell people to *stop!* Just *stop* being selfish...children are innocent, period. They shouldn’t have to be resilient so you can “be happy” or “fulfilled” or whatever it is you think you’re missing out on. I understand that in cases of danger/abuse you need to protect yourself and your children, but nine times out of ten, that’s not what divorce is.

Kids are people pleasers, whether it’s for Mom and Dad, their teacher, or some other person of authority in their lives. They may look happy or sound happy if that’s what you want from them, but that doesn’t always mean that way down deep they *are* happy! No one knew when I was struggling...when I was depressed...when I was cutting or starving myself or having sex to fill the void in my heart that was created because I was unwanted and felt unloved. When people asked, I said I was FINE; later, I heard it was an acronym for—and pardon the vulgar language—F\*\*\*\*\* up, Insecure, Neurotic, and Emotional...and boy did that fit for a long time in my life. I was *not just fine*, I was broken, turned over, and broken some more. And eventually I did go on to live a successful life, but I had so much heartache on the way

there that was not my choosing—and at the time I didn't know there was another way.

Life is about sacrifices...big ones, little ones. When done out of love, it is so much better and the rewards are so much greater than you or I being “happy” 24/7. No one ever said it would be easy! Look at the cross...do you think *that* was easy for Christ?? *No*, but He did it anyway, and He did it because He loves us. And so, what...you can't stay in your marriage and love your spouse like you promised to do until this life ends? Why, because you're unhappy? Get over yourself...the world does not revolve around you...*stop* being selfish. Pray, stay, and pray—and repeat. Put a smile on your face and speak to God in your heart until the season of sadness within your marriage passes. And it will pass, one way or another. Be true to your *vows*, be true to your children, and be true to yourself in upholding the “in good times *and* in bad times” part of your marriage. Make yourself little in the eyes of God, your spouse, and your children so that you can find your *lasting joy*!! [55]

Kids will be just fine? I don't believe it. When one or both parents make the decision to stop working on the problems in a marriage, that communicates a strong message to the children that vows and covenants can be broken, and that relationships and people are disposable. Very often children, with their limited maturity and understanding, perceive their parents' divorce as their fault—something that they did to cause their parents to split. That was the case for me, and I'm sure for most children on some level. Children are often not even aware that they are blaming themselves, as that can occur on a subconscious level, too. [63]

Divorce has left scars. My father was in the home until I was 22, but I had no man to teach me what to look for in a husband. When my husband and I said we were moving in together, no one stopped us or said anything other than that it was a “good idea” since we'd be so far from family and friends (about 13 hours away). If my father hadn't

been having his own affair, would he have stopped us? If he had been able to find reasons to love my mother, would he have shown me how to love? Would I have ended up divorced, as I am today? I now know living together before marriage makes us more likely to divorce. I wonder if they hadn't been so caught up in their affairs, if I would have been less likely to divorce. I wonder if my children will look at me the same way one day. I wonder how I can break cycles and not repeat mistakes.

I am doing well in many ways, yet at 46, over 20 years after my parents' divorce, I still feel bad telling my mom we are doing something with my dad or even mentioning my dad. I am not really close to him and she knows that, but still...

I still really wish for that intact family. I want to celebrate their anniversaries and have them over for holidays, etc. My father's new wife is nice, but she is not the woman I want to celebrate with. She is not a part of me. [14]

Divorce is terribly hard on children. I believe that parents who decide to divorce just because they're not "happy" are incredibly selfish. Short of serious abuse of some sort, I believe parents owe it to their children to find a way to stay married. Yes, children are resilient, and yes, they want their parents to be happy; however, not in the way everyone keeps saying. Our children love us, and so if they see us sad, they want us to be happy—but never have I seen that desire trump the desire to have parents who are married. If you ask a child if they want their parents together, nearly all would do anything to have Mommy and Daddy be married again. My happiness is not more important than the happiness of my children. I hate that my children were forced to go through the same thing I was. [17]

Kids are happy when their parents do not live selfishly. Kids are happy when their parents strive to live in humility. [56]

I would say to those people that that's an excuse—an excuse with no foundation in reality. Children are happier when they are surrounded by love and sacrifice. [19]

Poppycock. Children *are* resilient, but they are not indestructible. The familial world is a child's entire reality. Even in the teenage years, everything exists in comparison to the family. When the family fractures, the world itself is broken. A child's resiliency can allow him to adapt, but what was lost is gone. Everything that comes after, even if from two loving, divorced parents, is a shadow of what could have been.

Buildings are resilient, too. From medieval cathedrals to modern state-of-the-art steel constructions, buildings are made to last. But they rarely survive a major earthquake. That is what divorce is. It is not a storm to be weathered, but a total upheaval of the ground beneath you. Kids survive all the time and go on to lead happy lives and build solid families based on loving marriages, but they are never the same—never what they could have been if the ground had remained stable and supportive beneath them. [5]

It's bullsh\*t. Kids shouldn't even have to discern if their parents are "happy," whatever that means. Humans are resilient and the kids may survive, but they won't be unwounded or unscathed. Children need a safe world with defined boundaries. Divorce takes all those things away. And yes, there are "good" divorces where less damage is done, but even those children suffer. [67]

When people say these things to excuse divorce, they give each other ammunition to quit. God doesn't want us to quit. He gave us marriage. When we say "yes" to that person, it's "yes forever." It's not "yes, unless it just gets inconvenient." Of course marriage is inconvenient. Life is inconvenient! Children are strong and much, much smarter than we realize. They are happy when their mom and

dad are happy *together*. So I want to say, “Stop enabling and justifying divorce. It’s selfish and has ripple effects that only God can see.” [68]

I feel like people say kids are resilient because they (the adults) are selfish and want to make themselves feel better; hopefully they realize how negatively this affects kids. I was glad to hear that nowadays, they make families go through some training on how to co-parent after divorce. They advise the adults not to speak ill of their ex-spouse, as the kid might take it personally. In most cases, all the kids want is to be a family again, and I think divorced parents try to mask the sadness with toys, food, or “fun outings” to distract them. Or they manipulate the child into choosing a favorite parent, which is obviously very dysfunctional and divisive. People should let the children process their sadness and grief, and reassure them that those feelings are absolutely normal! [54]

Of course kids are resilient. That doesn't mean you should cause them lifelong pain over what is very often a temporary problem. Serious abuse aside, there is absolutely no problem that cannot be overcome. There are those who say kids would be happier in a separated home, rather than with two parents who are constantly screaming. I disagree. Of course it's not good to be around constant fighting, but it's preferable to the complete life upheaval that divorce entails. The solution isn't divorce; it's working together, fixing your problem, and getting over that hump. [25]

When people say, "Children are resilient," I want them to know that the children hurt so much inside. Children are good at *hiding* it. What are we supposed to do when the parents we love are in pain and going through a divorce? Start rolling on the floor, bawling, and begging them not to? We want to protect our parents and not add to their distress.

Also, I was raised in the generation of “children are to be seen but not heard.” My mom announced to us that she and my dad were



getting a divorce—that was it. As children, we were never part of major decisions...how would us falling apart make any difference in the outcome? If it did, maybe we would? I don't know. But children feel pain like adults do when they have their first break-up. It is extremely painful. I remember driving away in the car with my mom when she left, and my heart literally felt like it physically hurt. The parent going through a divorce is involved in so much of their own turmoil, it's impossible to see the children's pain. The adults are in survival mode, and so are their children. [1]

My parents didn't divorce when I was a child (I was 21 when they separated), so I have no personal knowledge of this, but I have seen young children of divorce grow up to be more insecure adults. I lived this, too, because children whose parents don't have a happy, secure marriage—whether or not they divorce—may struggle and suffer from feeling insecure. I can't say with authority what affects kids more—their parents divorcing, or having to live through their parents' difficult marriage. I would guess, though, that those kids who see their parents stick it out—making efforts to improve and save a difficult marriage—benefit from seeing the virtues of sacrifice and hard work lived out.

When my son was around five years old, we were sitting around the table at breakfast and he asked me, "Mom, who do you love more, Dad or us?" I took a deep breath, prayed to the Holy Spirit and replied: "We are all called to love God above all else. I share a sacrament with your father, so I am called to love him most, after God. Then comes you guys, then everyone else." I waited and held my breath. He said, "Okay. Can you please pass the milk?" That was it. There was no psychological trauma; it was the truth, plain and simple. I am starting to see many marriages failing, and I think part of that is because once the kids come, moms especially tend to put all their focus on the kids and neglect their husbands. I vowed never to do this. My kids are perfectly fine with it and well-adjusted, and our children certainly don't take a backseat. They get plenty of attention. I think kids do feel more

secure when they see their parents putting one another first. In this day and age, having the world revolve our kids is not a good idea!! We already see enough of that, thank you. My husband and I refuse to perpetuate that problem! [30]

I've said it before and I will say it again: It is only by the grace and mercy of God that my husband and I have made it. There were countless times I wanted to give up and go the way of my own parents, but somehow we held it together. Even knowing what I knew about the effects of divorce on children, I found it difficult to trust that we could see it through, and I nearly chose to devastate my own children with divorce. Witnessing my own parents throw away their marriage and family made it particularly challenging to see a way out of my own marital difficulties.

After my parents' divorce, I was never "happy" with the way things were. I simply accepted that I had no control over any of it. I suffered terribly, and that suffering manifested in countless ways throughout my childhood, including bedwetting (after having been toilet trained for three years), nightmares and sleep walking, anxiety and depression, and eventually alcohol, drugs, and promiscuity starting at about age 16. [43]

Resiliency? Well, the divorce stripped me entirely of my faith...God had been totally obscured from view because of the trauma of separation and divorce, and He became a complete stranger to me. All of the carefully prepared for, reverently received sacraments of my childhood were not enough to blunt the trauma to my faith that came from the wrecking ball that was divorce. When I finally realized that there wasn't a way *around* dealing with the realities of my parents' dysfunction and the civil divorce that followed it, I began to make personal progress—tackling it head-on. From my knees, which was all I could accomplish by that point in my twenties, I found myself talking to an unfamiliar God who I wasn't sure was listening. I also wasn't sure I held God blameless for allowing me to grow up the way I had, and

with the resulting family structure I was left with when the majority of the “dysfunction cloud” had settled. And yet, God heard my prayers and, mercifully, restored my faith.

My siblings have not taken the same restorative path as me. Their 20s and 30s have been spent still dealing with the realities of their destroyed family. They have not been able to keep their faith due to the divorce, and they are completely devoid of any faith in God. They believe that they are in control of what happens, without a need for a God. They mock me for having a faith. I’m not trying to inflate my ability to cope over my siblings’ ability, but rather to draw a distinction as to how it impacts each child of a family uniquely.

We don’t attend each others’ weddings, baptisms, or graduations. We, as siblings, are constant mirrors of our parents’ dysfunction to each other, even to this day. We have been unable to find common ground, and it always comes back to the circumstances surrounding the separation and divorce of our parents. That is the root cause. I didn’t just lose parents, I also lost siblings, nieces, and nephews. My entire nuclear family disintegrated. Yet if you knew me only as a professional, you wouldn’t have any idea of what utter catastrophe my nuclear family represents in my world. In this way, I live two realities—the one that people expect from someone who “has her ducks in a row” and the one of shaking my head at the train wreck that my nuclear family is and always will be. A resilient child I might be, but that can’t change the reality that family is always a sore subject...which I share with very few people.

Divorce impacts every holiday, every milestone in life, every accomplishment and failure. It impacts the way I relate to my own spouse and his family. It impacts how I deal with growing my own family. And most importantly—I can’t stress this enough—it impacts my inner dialogue. That inner dialogue is a daily reminder that what I had modeled for me is not what I can trust or take for granted. I have to constantly question how I know something and whether my reaction or thoughts or feelings are a part of a healthy process or a furthering of dysfunction that is misplaced in the life I choose to lead. I

have to keep a hyper-vigilance for combativeness that isn't normal. So, yes, resilience is great—and some children are resilient—but it's not a replacement for love when love is lacking. Resilience is the consolation prize when a child isn't reason enough to love. It shouldn't be anyone's goal to attribute this poverty as a virtue.

The last thing I would say to someone who thinks kids are resilient? The first moment of peace I felt since my parents' divorce was the day I learned my father died, 20 years after their separation. It was a finality that only comes with death that brought that peace. No moment in the past 20 years had—but the finality of death did. Each of my siblings admitted in a rare moment of candor and agreement that we all finally believed it was over. And we believed that after all the ugliness, our parents had still loved each other, but had gotten lost by their inability to deal with life. [69]

I still have bad dreams of my father weeping over the loss of everything he had worked so hard for. He loved his family with his life, and it was all rejected—it was crushing. For us kids, love suddenly meant something very different. Before the divorce, we thought love was durable and well-disciplined with a strength to ride out the bad and build on the good. It instead became a thing of feelings and emotional storms, weak and mindless. However, since we siblings were older, we were able to dismiss that new value system; the pain of its selfishness made it easy to reject. [47]

Yes, most children are resilient, but when parents divorce, the bond in the family that holds them all together is pronounced by the courts as “broken”—and that affects the child. Marriage in the Church is a bond that cannot actually be broken, making the whole vision of divorce confusing. The world says it is the dissolution of the marriage, but the Church says that is impossible. [35]

Kids from broken marriages are broken. I am an educator and see this daily. I can pick out kids who come from strong, faith-filled, intact

families. They are better students, and they are a lot happier than their peers. [34]

To those people who say “children are resilient”: You think children are resilient because of how children respond to the adults. Children *know* that their feelings are trumped by their parents’ feelings. If a parent expresses feelings that are not in line with what the child is feeling, the child’s feelings are negated and moved inward. Those feelings are hidden, and they morph into what many adults of divorced parents struggle with—insecurity! We look resilient because we still function somewhat normally. We seem resilient because we don’t voice our emotions or hurt feelings. Why? Because our parents will negate our feelings with their overpowering, apathetic, anti-my-marriage-to-your-dad/mom propaganda, brainwashing us into a parallel universe that screams, “I HAVE NO RIGHT TO FEEL DEVASTATED THAT MY PARENTS ARE DIVORCED,” because my parents are happy about it, and only their feelings count!

Those people are simply ignorant about children of divorced parents.

Kids are not happy. They are siding with the parent out of fear! Kids instinctually fear neglect. When a child can’t live with and have a normal, functioning relationship with both parents, there is emotional neglect. How can a parent properly raise up a child and meet the child’s emotional needs when they are regularly absent on day-to-day basis? They can’t. The kids aren’t happy; they feel neglected. As I said, kids sense when their feelings are put on the back burner to their parents’ feelings, and kids feel shafted when their parents’ happiness comes first, before their own. Again, these claims of “kids are happy when their parents are happy” are ignorance and justifications for divorce—propaganda. The kids might even repeat so as to not offend their parents; after all, if they left each other, what’s stopping the parents from leaving the child? Thus, the insecurity.

“Kids of divorce will be just fine and will go on to live successful lives.” Successful doesn’t equate to an absence of being scarred, hurt, angry, insecure, miserable, etc. [44]

I’d say they are lying in order to justify and excuse their own sin and failure. I have a hard time believing that deep down they actually believe those statements are true. It’s also most likely the case that if children of divorce go on to get married, the issues from the divorce will still crop up, even in a supposedly “healthy” marriage. [32]

I want to say that even if these things are true to some extent, they don’t prevent the child from carrying a cross—often a heavy one. Kids and parents experience divorce differently; even into adulthood, our roles in the family are fundamentally different, and we will always experience family life from a different angle than our parents. A parent might be able to totally start over with a new spouse, experiencing freedom from the first marriage and only minimal contact with the first spouse. For the child, however, their worlds *will forever be fundamentally split. Forever*. There is no starting over with a clean slate; things are now complicated and fractured. Divorce starts a family onto two different paths that, as the years unfold, grow further and further apart. It’s not a one-time event, but rather an ever-changing and ever-widening gap that only the children are really tasked with straddling and reconciling, season after season, change after change.

I think these platitudinal statements are short-sighted, too. At the time of the initial split, kids aren’t mature enough to fully process the divorce the way the parents are. I would tell them to fully expect their feelings and perceptions, even about the initial split, to change throughout their lives. [40]

I was not happy just because my mom was. I missed out on some important things that are supposed to happen between dads and daughters. It took years—no, decades—to get past it. I felt ripped off, like I got a raw deal. My brother missed out on the special bond a son is

supposed to have with his dad. We were chauffeured back and forth from him to her, depending on whose weekend it was. It was very hard, and it messed up any sort of routine we might have needed in our lives. [59]

I would want to tell people that divorce takes a horrific toll on kids. I don't even remember my parents' divorce, being so young, but my life was incredibly hard from day one, and I *always* felt the absence of a father. I knew my situation was abnormal, and I watched my mom struggle very hard to make a life for us both. What's different about my situation is that I never wanted to see my dad when it was time for our visitation. We weren't bonded, and I knew I wasn't a priority. Apparently my mother was never even supposed to get pregnant with me, because my father said he already had too many kids to worry about (he had three from his first wife).

By the time my mom did remarry when I was 11, I couldn't bond with that man either. My paternal need was never really met. Yes I wanted my mother to be happy, but not at the expense of my sense of well-being and security. I never felt secure. [39]

To the point about children being happy if their parents are happy: That's just bullsh\*t, to put it frankly. Of course I want my parents to be happy, but they can be happy while I still feel awful inside. I put on a happy face (well, maybe a grimace) for so long, and I didn't address my own pain because I didn't want my parents to be upset by it. Being a good Catholic woman, my mother has found happiness in her career and as a catechist at my parish. My father's finding of happiness involved dating, cohabitation, and remarriage. But it's hard to be happy when, as a child, you have to stay 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> weekends, and every other holiday in a house where the religion you believe wholeheartedly says things aren't the way they should be. [37]

I would note that almost 100% of the men and women I have met in post-abortion healing retreats came from divorced parents. [33]

For all the people who say that kids are resilient and can live healthy, successful lives: I guess it depends on how you view success and health and resiliency. Being 31 and unmarried with no kids is *not* the end of the world, but being 31 and still dealing with emotional/mental baggage in addition to being unmarried with no kids may change your view.

I guess I'd want people to know and understand that people with divorced parents see the world differently. It's just how it is. Even with the "best" divorces like mine, a seven-year-old should never be in a position to somehow take the responsibility of her parents' emotions. She should never have to think about which parent gets to hear or see something from her first, for fear of hurting the other parent's feelings. She should never have to feel like she doesn't belong in the home of her parents.

None of these things were done on purpose. My parents did the best they could to keep me at the center, to keep me as the focus, so that my life could have minimal turbulence. But all a child really wants is the security of knowing that both of her parents are there, together—not perfectly, but fighting for one another and for their family to be together.

The kids never get the chance to grieve the loss of their parents' marriage. The kids are just expected to be okay and move on. After all, they're kids! They'll bounce back! But no one takes the time to even allow them to grieve. A divorce is a loss—a loss of their parents together, a loss of the world they knew, and a loss of the security that comes with a whole family unit.

As I'm typing and thinking...One of the main things people don't seem to get or even want to acknowledge is that it's okay for the child *not* to be okay with the divorce. The child should be encouraged to talk about that, to help him or her process. When something *huge* changes in a child's life, don't ignore it or suppress the child's thoughts and feelings. If it makes you, as the parent, uncomfortable—well, I'm sorry. This is the choice that was made. You now have to deal with the consequences. Sure, you're happy now that you're not dealing with



your ex, but your kid doesn't *have* to be happy and excited about this change, too. It's not fair for them, and it's not fair that you'd have that expectation.

For me, the very fact that my parents worked so hard to be civil and kind to one another was somewhat confusing. I mean, my parents get along so great! They listen to one another! They make plans! They do things! Why did they have to get divorced if they worked so hard afterwards? It's almost like the divorce didn't even make sense, you know?

My brother and sister-in-law went through their lowest point in marriage last year, and my brother brought up divorce. For as long as I can remember my brother always said he would never, ever get divorced; he would work hard and do everything he could to avoid it (I mean, our family is dripping in divorce). The very fact that he got to a place where divorce was an option? I absolutely believe it's because divorce was his example. It was shocking and sad and all that, especially because I think about my nieces, and my heart breaks. But, thanks be to God, they have worked so hard and are in a much, much better place. Pray for them! [9]

I will never do to my kids what divorce did to me, my sisters, and my mom and dad. Not even an option. My sisters and I are tough cookies, very independent and strong-headed as a result of this, but the heartache and barriers and so many other things that resulted from the divorce? I would not want anyone to have to deal with that. No family should have to. [2]

Children are resilient, that's true. Having worked in orphanages, I can say that with absolute certainty. But that resilience is so much better utilized in overcoming the hardships that exist simply because we live in a fallen world. The need for resilience shouldn't stem from bad actions by the creators, protectors, and primary educators of children.

I am in a good marriage now, but it is seen by others as nothing more than a “lucky choice.” I found the right guy, they think, so of course our relationship is easy; we just got lucky. Well, luck didn’t have much to do with it. We had a lot of issues, but we converted to Catholicism, we’ve grown much in our faith, and we continue to try to figure this whole thing out—with the help of the saints and martyrs, and the brilliant folks in the Catholic Church. Without those writings and those voices helping us, we would have continued to flounder.

Sure, there is some happiness for some of the divorced and remarried couples; for others, not so much. But there is something so backwards about the parents wanting their children to condone this indulgence. It’s never going to feel right being from a broken home. And despite the desires of all parties for acceptance, I can’t look at a group picture and not think that my dad should be the man sitting next to my mom. [46]

Kids of divorced parents can appear “successful” in the eyes of society, but, on the inside, things can be quite different. I would consider myself having led a successful life...*but*, I had, and still have, struggles from growing up without a father. I recognize it in the little things I do. I went to therapy for many years, and I have learned to pinpoint and address my issues as they arise, which has made me a healthier person. My Catholic faith plays the most important role in my progress and growth. [36]

I say, yes, children are resilient, but there are some things that are very hard to bounce back from, and your parents’ divorce is one of those things. And yes, things are a little easier when your parents are happy, but that doesn’t erase the damage done. In fact, a fair amount of the time (and in my parents’ case) at least one parent isn’t happy, which makes it even harder. My parents have been separated for six years, and I am still affected by it, as if it just happened yesterday. The guilt, worry, and sadness are still fairly prevalent feelings for me. I hope that

it's not going to affect my possible future marriage or my life in general, but separation and divorce do damage. [22]

I think a bad marriage can be just as damaging as divorce. At the core of our society's problems is the breakdown of the family—husbands and wives not loving each other as they're called to, and lack of willingness to joyfully sacrifice and suffer. [61]

When my parents divorced, I lost all sense of what “home” means. We have no childhood home to go to for the holidays, and every holiday still feels a bit strange and complicated—trying to figure out where we'll go and who we'll spend time with, worrying about whose feelings we might hurt or which parent would think we loved them less because schedules happened to work out better in the other parent's favor. Maybe this is being overly analytical, but those are the gut-level feelings we have to deal with every year. Even though a childhood home is just a building and a place, our parents' marriage was the foundation and “home” of our family. Until I was married, I felt so lost. Now that I'm married, home is with my husband and our children. But too many children of divorce never marry. Do they ever feel a sense of home?

Also, an intact marriage and family provides that “safe haven” for children to exist in until they've embraced and owned their own faith. Too many divorces occur before children are strong in their faith. Thankfully, I had already started coming back to the Church when my parents divorced, but the same cannot be said for some of my siblings. I have read research showing that children of divorce are less likely to pursue/continue their faith life.

I truly wonder if the rise in divorce rates has contributed to the huge problem of teens being so fragile mentally. There is *so much* teen depression and lack of self-confidence, and also a huge lack of respect for teachers. So many children are being raised in broken homes and are asked to follow so many different sets of rules—I wonder if that is

why consistent boundaries cannot be instilled by parents and thus children grow up not respecting authority or boundaries?

I love my stepparent and am so glad that person is a part of my life, but my now single parent will grow old alone, without the care of a spouse, and this saddens me greatly. For parents who don't remarry, who will take care of them as they grow old? We have an aging population and a high divorce rate. Children may hope to take care of their divorced single parents as they age, but financial ability varies, and the younger adults are wallowing in student debt. Ultimately, divorce isn't just costly to those within the family on a physical and psychological level—it has big financial effects on our society, too. [49]

I think the people who say "kids are resilient" are trying to assuage guilt, rationalize decisions, or are truly just hoping that's the case. I can tell you from experience that divorce absolutely devastates kids. Even worse, we don't want to make our parents feel bad because we see they are already hurting, so we hide our devastation. Divorce for kids is just not natural. It's like asking a kid if a mom should kill the baby in her womb. Kids are naturally and rightly horrified by this question and scream, "No!" Adults have become desensitized by the world we live in, and they will rationalize anything to make it okay for them...This is moral relativism. [41]

I often think that those words can be a justification for divorce. Of course, if there is danger, those statements could be spot on, but, on the whole, I think the scars are deeper than people realize and not fully understood by a culture that listens shallowly—if it listens at all. [8]

As a parent of kids of divorce, I can adamantly say that kids are not resilient. They need their mom and dad. They need us to be adults. They need us to have emotional intelligence. They need us to love God with all of our hearts, minds, and souls. They need us to love our spouse above everything. That is, plain and simple, how you are a good parent. Everything else falls into place.

I can see this in my own household: When I am obedient to the Holy Spirit, the calm and peace come; but when I am resistant, there is chaos. I'm sure there are children of divorce who go on to live successful, happy lives. My sister is one of them. She does, however, have a strong gift of faith and married a loving, Catholic man. But even she has anger over the problems post-divorce brings. She was, perhaps, able to see my life and difficulties and choose a different path. As far as my own divorce, my adult children have many of my same issues: depression, anxiety, anger, apathy towards faith, etc. [23]

First of all, I call BS. Yes, kids are resilient, but that shouldn't be the reason that divorce is okay. Kids are happy when their parents are happy, but imagine what their perceptions would be like to see their parents overcome adversity, to work through hard situations, and to stay together because they learned that love isn't a feeling but an act of the will—an act of sacrifice. What would our country look like if we had a generation of children who saw their parents embrace the challenges of life rather than run from them? What we see too often today is an overindulgent world that discards what is hard or difficult. We have forgotten that there isn't anything worth having that doesn't require effort. [52]

I think they are right about all those things, but just because kids are resilient doesn't mean they should have to suffer the pain of divorce. Children can overcome many difficult situations, even the effects of physical abuse, but does that mean we should not try to protect them from harm? I think kids are happy when their parents are happy, so parents should try everything they can to create a happy home, not give up and run. My experience is that parents will try to find this happiness with someone else, so why not try to fix the marriage you are in? It will be so much easier for your children. I would honestly tell anyone that I would not want their child to feel the pain that I did. [50]

To say that kids are resilient is to dismiss what they are actually experiencing, which is the loss of all that is good, holy, true, and stable in their world. It is the wound that never heals. While the parents may go on to find happiness, it is the children who cannot escape the situation and must relive it each and every holiday, each and every drop-off and pick-up, and even on their wedding day and the births of their own children. For the children, it never, ever ends. Never. [65]

## Chapter Five

# Speak to Your Parents, Then and Now

***“What would you say directly to your parents about the divorce and how it affected your life then and now? Would you advise them to do things differently, and, if so, what? For the record, one or more young divorced parent has told me that adult children of divorce only want to speak to me for this book because of ‘unconscious revenge’ against their parents, and that they simply have not ‘forgiven’ their parents, which is the only way to heal. Thoughts on that?”***

I have spoken directly to my parents about it. My mom has apologized and asked for forgiveness for her role in the situation, and we have long since forgiven her. It is a lopsided situation, because she never wanted the divorce to begin with, and she never agreed with the annulment. She acknowledges that she is not perfect, and she clearly did her best with many painful life circumstances. We have a great relationship with her and my stepdad. I think my mom and I both agree that they should have stuck out the marriage, but my dad—a lawyer—filed for no-fault divorce, and she never stood a chance to see the marriage through.

I have had some lengthy conversations with my dad. He seemed to make marriage work with his new wife who is a highly dysfunctional woman. It baffles me that he *could not* stick it out with my mom when

he *could* find a way to navigate another, more difficult relationship. I have forgiven him, but that doesn't make our relationship okay. He continues to be defensive, continues to shirk responsibility for the break-up of our family, and continues the same unhealthy patterns from decades ago, even with more money and stability.

I actually almost worshiped my dad as an adolescent. I thought he was such a great guy, and for a long time I thought I was totally fine with the divorce. He has practiced his faith in the ensuing years and actually was instrumental in bringing me back to Catholicism. But these problems and negative dynamics didn't end with the divorce; in fact, they grow and continue. Forgiveness is a process, because you find yourself having to forgive your parent over and over again for continuing the dysfunctional behavior. The divorce didn't solve anything. It just led to an even more complicated and dysfunctional dynamic. Please know that this is never over until we're all dead. [16]

I have told my parents how I feel and how it has affected me and my siblings. I went over it all with my mother—her perceived “need” to divorce my father—and she knows the damage it has caused. There is no desire for “revenge,” but navigating through the detritus gets exhausting, and the barrier to trust is still there and probably always will be. The result is a lack of confidence in my mother's judgment, and with it comes a lack of respect. Although I know my mother understands and tried to teach us the virtues of strength, sacrifice, and honor, it was all swept away with her decision. [47]

Dear Parents,

There was never any justification for how you behaved in your separation and divorce from each other. I learned how *not* to behave by watching you. I learned how *not* to make decisions by watching yours. As a child, I had a different vantage point...but as an adult, I see things very clearly.

You each have a vantage point, and each vantage point is in defense of yourself in the most selfish way. Your actions and words



were not in defense of your marriage, and that was where you failed—when that stopped being your priority. I am a living, breathing piece of both of you, and I understand you both on a genetic level that you will never have perspective to understand. Hear me when I say this: *You could have saved your marriage if you had put effort into the right decisions.* You chose to model dysfunction, and, though I have become inured to that, it's not to my benefit now, it never has been, and it never will be.

Your efforts to garner support for your dysfunctional logic and actions are empty and sad. I will never agree that the parents who created me should be separate from each other, no matter how horrible you are to each other or what justification you tell yourself in order to sleep at night. I will never take a side. The reason the unrest persists in each of you is because you made the wrong decision. My existence is proof of the sacrament you undertook. I am a walking, breathing reminder of the vow you made to each other. You can ignore your promises to each other, but you can't ignore my existence as easily.

How can a child forgive her parents for breaking their home? I forgive you anyway. How can a child be doubled with burden at every milestone and holiday because of your decision to be separate from each other? I carry the burden anyway. How can a child learn how to be a functional adult who values marriage and models good decision-making in her own romantic love relationships? I persist in trying anyway. I do this for myself, to model the behavior and actions that you chose not to provide for me. And I endeavor to carry none of the animosity you taught me, because the weight of it is useless in my pursuit of Heaven.

You have failed me by destroying my family for selfish gain, while lying that it was for my benefit. I love you anyway. Make amends with God if you care about me. Better yet, do it for each other. Or yourselves. Otherwise, know that I will always want better for you than you have chosen for yourselves and each other. [69]

If I were to speak directly to them now, I would let them know how hurtful the divorce was, and the long-term psychological effect it had on all of us.

If I could speak to them back then, I would advise them to give their lives to Christ and stop being nominally Catholic. I would advise them to work harder on their marriage.

I have no desire for revenge, and I have absolutely forgiven my parents. That doesn't mean I think their divorce was a good idea after all. It wasn't. It was a terrible scourge, and, because of the divorce, lots of other terrible things happened, like my dad being estranged from me for a few years because of his new wife who hated us; this estrangement never would have happened! [57]

I do not wish to say anything to them at all about it. It's done. What good would it do? I also have a hard time believing that, even if I had articulated my thoughts to them at the time of the divorce, it would have made any difference whatsoever. I think they still would have gone through with it. [32]

I would want to tell them that they abandoned me emotionally when they went on to new relationships; that I never felt like I was fully welcome in their homes; that it hurt that they were spending more time with their new families than with me; that their unrealistic expectations and comments about me "getting over it" were very hurtful; that they seemed more concerned about taking care of themselves than me; that even though we lived in affluent areas and even though we had some of the things that affluent people have, it didn't fill the void I felt in my heart and in my life; and that I know they were capable of being good parents, because I saw them treat other kids that way.

As far as that comment from the divorced parent, claiming we are speaking in this book out of "unconscious revenge"...that person is operating under the false believe that "kids are resilient." That's why the parent says that. I'm guessing he or she feels guilty and is trying to

silence us, hoping to impose speech restrictions onto people who are vulnerable, hurting, and struggling for answers, people who live in a culture that has failed to provide an adequate theoretical framework to understand our issues. What that person is doing is cruel; it's another manifestation of the kind of burdens we must endure. [26]

Both my parents are deceased now. I'm not angry, but I just don't understand. I would want to know if there was any reconsideration during and/or after the divorce. The talk is that my mom wanted the divorce and my dad did not. Relatives were very angry with my mother, and they would tell me so. I felt horrible. [11]

Oh, how I wish I could tell them to go to the Catholic Church, to put their faith in Jesus, to submit and trust Him. Honestly, I cannot imagine saying anything else, because I know that telling them about how the divorce affected my life would not make any difference—they would just discount my thoughts, feelings, and perspective, as always.

As for "unconscious revenge"? Obviously, a guilty conscience there. And again, wow, the audacity of sinning terribly against your kids and then telling them that kids should handle it perfectly by just forgiving and not being angry? I think that the way to heal sometimes includes getting angry at an injustice, at being sinned against, before true forgiveness can occur. But people often want us to short-cut the process. I also put "they did the best they could" into this category of unhelpful responses I've gotten when I've tried to get help or counsel in dealing with my parents. [21]

My mother was the spouse who started seeing/sleeping with another man, while married. At the time she worked nights, but would sometimes not go to work. Yes, we know you did this, Mom. Just because you don't think we saw it doesn't mean your acts were hidden or secretive. One night while you were supposedly at work, I called to find out what medication dosage to give my little sister who had started running a fever—and you weren't there. You tried to make your

coworker cover for you, but apparently having an affair with someone at work makes you the talk of the water cooler. When I confronted you, I was told it was none of my business. When I went to my grandmother and aunt, both said it was no big deal, everyone does it. Because of what you've done, I trust no one. Trust with me has to be earned and is not freely given.

I still talk to all these people, but I don't see any of them as a role model.

The day her civil divorce was finalized, my mom got remarried to the “man” she had been cheating with. My father passed away at an early age, six years after the divorce. [10]

If I could speak to them back then, I would advise them to not give up and to keep trying, for their own sake as well as for my sister and me. I would advise them to keep trying therapy, to keep looking for a counselor that works for them. Above all, I would advise them to start praying together again, and to pray for each other.

If I were to say something now, I would like to tell my parents that I miss having a whole family. I miss spending holidays together and not feeling guilty about one of them being alone. I would tell them that I worry about their souls and their standing with the Church.

As for the reason I am speaking to you, Mrs. Miller—it's not some kind of revenge—it's because I hope my story might help change the mind of someone who's considering divorce, let other children going through it know that they're not alone, and help bring awareness to divorced parents of what their child goes through and maybe start a conversation. [22]

I have totally forgiven my parents, but the observations and repercussions are real and aren't forgotten. I'm grateful for how much I have learned from their mistakes, but, at the same time, I still see bitterness and anger in some of my siblings—especially those who haven't come back to the Faith and taken their brokenness to God for healing. I see them carry that weight, and it's so very sad.

Also, when my parents divorced, the mutual bad-mouthing and passive-aggressive negativity thrown at each other—with us kids in the middle—was awful. I know they were both frustrated and needed to vent, but I don't think either of them realized the deep psychological pain they needed to process, and that it was not okay to use their children—even though we were adults—as pawns. Sometimes it came to pitting sibling against sibling, and that was terrible.

If I could have spoken directly to my parents back then, I would have told them to seek out counseling long before it was “too late.” I would have told them that even if health insurance didn't cover marriage counseling, ask friends and family for help, even if they felt embarrassed to do so. I would have told them to ask the Church for help and prayers and even for financial help for counseling. I would have told them they needed to pray as a couple—something I had never seen them do. I would have told them that God must be at the center of their marriage, that they were losing focus on the family, and that they were pursuing too much of their own self-interest. This focus on themselves was destroying their marriage and, ultimately, breaking apart the family. [49]

I want to say, *Why didn't my happiness count? Why didn't you care that I was always afraid that you wouldn't get along? You want me to get along with my brothers, but you can't get along with my other parent, your spouse?* I wasn't surprised when my father told us he had met someone else and was divorcing my mother. In some ways, we had been waiting for this moment for as long as I could remember. When my father got remarried, I remember thinking, “At least he is happy—that's what it's all about.” I didn't realize then, as a young adult, that life isn't just about making yourself happy.

I want to tell my father that he should have been less selfish, that my mom was and is a good person. He was very caught up in looks and appearances, and, frankly, my mom was a slob. I want to tell my mom that her family should have come ahead of the town, basketball

practice, and other stuff she led. I want to tell them that all the “wealth” they were building meant nothing if we lost our security.

I want to go back and tell them to stop being mean to each other.  
[14]

I don't need to say anything to my parents. My mother is angry and bitter. There is nothing to be gained. My father has expressed regret to me, and we have a very good relationship. One thing I would advise anybody, married or divorced, is never to speak ill of the other parent. Through it all, my father never said a single negative word about my mother, and I believe that is why I am close to him today.  
[28]

My parents' divorce was especially difficult to deal with, because I had a full plate of responsibilities as a wife and mother, and the emotional turmoil affected my day-to-day life. I didn't speak to my mother for two years. I had so much anger, and it boiled over into everything. I was pregnant part of that time, and the poor child has been my smallest and sickliest one.

If I could speak to them back then, I would advise them to do things differently. Throughout their married lives, they ignored things and grew apart. That was a mistake.

I did tell them that, while it would be nice if they worked things out, I didn't care if they just had to grin and bear it—they should stay together for the sake of the rest of us. It's not like they ever really fought. They just wanted to do different things. They never even saw a counselor. I finally twisted their arms into going to Retrouvaille, but the divorce papers were already signed, and they didn't really try. It was all so cowardly. It's hard to forgive someone who blows off how much they hurt you, but I think part of the problem is that the damage keeps coming. In many cases, you can distance yourself from people who continue to damage you, but you can't do that when it's your parents. Even if you try, the distancing itself hurts, too. It's like trying to hack off a limb. And then what do you tell your kids, who love their

grandparents? “Grandma can't come visit, because she is in an adulterous relationship and makes Mommy cry?” [53]

For a while now, I have wanted to ask my mom if she wishes she had hung on, but I haven't. I have forgiven them fully, but only recently. I was the kind of kid who never wanted anyone to feel bad or suffer, so I said, “It's fine” and “I understand.” I didn't even know my pain was buried, but every now and then something would trigger this little girl inside of me. Of course, you try to get over it quickly, because it's okay to be “childlike” but never “childish,” and it felt very childish to be pining for my parents to be together or complaining about what their divorce caused me to suffer.

I was led to Neal Lozano's *Unbound*, and the Holy Spirit healed my unresolved pain one night in prayer. I cried aloud (not loud enough to wake anyone), “Mom, I am angry that you gave up without more of a fight! And Dad, I'm mad that you pushed her to that point with your bad behavior!” I was also mad at the priest who eventually told my mother to “leave the bum.” It all floated away and left me with peace and freedom. I still feel sorrow. I struggle with some resentment and fear of having to maybe take care of my stepfather should something happen to my mom. Isn't that terrible? My kids love their PopPop. May God heal that in me. [20]

It was hard back then, especially once the divorce was over and they began to date other people. That is when we really took a back seat to everyone. It kind of left us feeling as if we were not special to the two people who are supposed to make us feel the most special, the most loved, and the most protected. It left us in turmoil and chaos, having to bounce around between them—even more so when we weren't wanted by my dad at all, even when we hadn't seen him in forever. How is that right? I acted like I didn't care, but only because it hurt so much. To protect myself, I blocked it out and pretended it didn't matter.

I don't know if I would suggest they do anything differently. I was so young that I really can't say much about how their relationship was, other than what they've told me. I would hope that if they had it to do again, they would love us enough to try harder to make it work. [59]

What to say? I really have no comment, because it does not change anything. What will it change? They divorced. I went through personal hell. [31]

I would tell them that, although I understand today that they did the best they could with the knowledge they had at the time, the divorce was devastating to me and my sister.

During the divorce, my mother did seek pastoral help in the Catholic Church, but, because of the harshness of a very difficult pastor in our parish, she left the Church and began to seek counsel with a Protestant pastor, and the marriage continued to disintegrate. She never did return to the Catholic Church.

I have to say that because both of my parents were alcoholics at the time of the divorce, I do not believe they possessed the clarity of thought, the maturity, or any of the skills needed to fight for their marriage. Alcoholism is a disease, and they were not in their right/sane/sobber minds. My father realized his mistake soon after the divorce and begged my mother to remarry him. She was trying to stay sober in her own recovery program and was advised by her sponsor to not remarry my father unless he would agree to get into recovery for himself. She wanted to remarry my father, but was fearful of how his lack of sobriety could, and most likely would, sabotage her sobriety. Sadly, my father was not able to receive the gift of sobriety, and he committed suicide within a few years of the divorce. [63]

I don't have feelings of revenge for my parents at all. If anything, I feel sorry for them. I wish they would have stayed together, but I also acknowledge the need for spousal love in a marriage—to not have that must have been terrible for them. I often think about how tragic that



is. It makes me sad to think about them enduring 25 years of a miserable marriage, and it helps temper my criticisms of their post-divorce lives. I can't overlook the scandal of divorce and having "significant others," but I do realize that my parents are human beings. I do my best to articulate Church teaching and leave it at that.

I don't have anything else to say to my parents that I haven't already said. I went through my angst period over the divorce, and I honestly wish to just have it behind me now. I'm not mad at my parents, I don't love them any less, and I thank God every day that He gave me the parents He did. I have a profound sorrow in my heart that my parents couldn't have a loving marriage, but I'm also profoundly grateful that, while they couldn't show love for each other, they have nothing but love to show for their children. [12]

If I could speak to my parents back then, I would like to tell them to put their children first, not last. I would like to tell them that the greatest love they could ever have is the love of their children. I would like to tell them that if they lay their lives down for one another, they could be happier than they ever imagined, and that if God were their foundation, the joys ahead would be bountiful. I would like to tell them that it is far better to build children than to repair men. I know there is much regret in their lives today as they age, and it is tragic to see my parents overwhelmed with guilt as they see their children struggle as adults.

Today, I can tell them little, but can only listen to them lament. My mother still cries about losing her children. My father was abusive and kicked my mother out of her house. My younger sisters have abandonment issues, and they find our elderly mother "annoying." I knew my mother did not want to leave us, but 50 years ago there was no support for women.

I know this is dangerous to say these days, but it seems so acceptable to equate domestic abuse with "there must automatically be divorce"—even within Catholic circles. When someone says they are divorced because of abuse, no one challenges that at all. I think

Catholics are afraid to question anything to do with abuse, so divorce in those circumstances is acceptable. But I believe, because I lived in it, that abuse and abusers need to be treated like an illness. I can see separation for a time (and physical separation for safety is the canon law remedy) so that the parties involved get the help they need, but I don't believe that a relationship *must* end in divorce because of it.

It seems that even Catholics believe that abusive relationships are "irreparable." I don't think anyone is irreparable when it comes to God's mercy! I believe my parents' relationship was repairable—if they would have given God a chance to repair it. I know I've opened a can of worms here, but even with my father's abuse, I don't think children should be pulled from their homes. I remain grateful that no one came and took me from my home. My mother was a battered woman, and she did not go willingly; I am sad she left us. She did the best she could under the most difficult circumstances. I probably went off on a tangent here, and I am sorry, but there is so much dysfunction, and I feel it is important to give some context. [64]

I would never say anything to them directly. I have certainly forgiven them. I wanted to speak up now because I believe we are being overlooked. Divorce has become so common, and it is always about the adults, with no regard for the children who will be the most profoundly affected by the decisions made. I just want people to know the very real pain that this casual attitude towards marriage and divorce is causing. I want to stop the next generations from going through the same thing. [25]

I would like to thank my mom over and over again. She made a difficult decision that was much better for me (and her) in the long run, by removing us from my dad. She always put me first (and continues to do so), often at her own expense. I wish my father had stepped up and been a better man, but he had so many problems. [19]

I would mostly want to say things to my mom, who wanted the divorce and left. I would want to say: *In your wedding vows you said "in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad," so why did you leave? Yes, it was a very hard situation, but that is what you vowed.* I would then explain how the divorce has changed their kids' lives forever. I would tell my dad that he should have been more assertive and fought harder to keep things together; this may be unfair, though, because it's hard to know exactly how much effort each parent put into the marriage. If I could speak to them during their marriage, I would certainly advise them to work through their problems and stay together.

To answer the second half of the question, I've thought for years now that a book like this needed to be written, so I was excited to hear that it was happening, and happy to contribute in any way that I could. My hope is that my words might be useful to a married couple thinking about divorce, that they might begin to think differently about the situation and change their minds. I also thought that answering these questions would be good for me, personally, because I haven't stopped to process a lot of my thoughts about my parents' divorce. I certainly do not seek revenge against my parents. I love them and will always wish them the best. But marriage in this country (and the world) is so under attack, and it's the foundation of society. So many of society's problems stem from broken homes. A book like this could really change people's minds and open their eyes to the real consequences of their decision to divorce, beyond simply how it will personally affect them. [48]

I really don't have any resentment left towards my parents. I have really wonderful brothers and a sister from my mom's current marriage. I wouldn't actually change anything, because my mom has been a beautiful example for me of a faithful, loving wife and mother. My younger brothers and sister inspire me to be a better person. I am happy to see my dad happy in his marriage; he has matured into a loving husband. [50]

I would say: God has brought good out of this. If my parents hadn't divorced, I never would have met my husband. I can't imagine loving anyone else like I love him. I can't imagine any children other than my own. I love my family so deeply. But I have to acknowledge that I am also deeply wounded. If I could go back, I would beg them to swallow their pride and seek counseling, *before the wedding*, to figure out if this is really something they both want. [29]

My mother is dead. She took her own life in 1992, in large part, I am certain, because of the bitterness over her failed marriage and where it led her. I believe the humiliation she suffered at the hands of my father and his second wife was partly responsible for her suicide. For a long time, I felt that she was probably in hell, and I could not bring myself to pray for her. That has changed, but, I don't know where she is. She is where she is. Wherever it is, it was her free will choice, and a just God has judged her according to how she responded to the grace she received in this life. I do pray for her, and I remember some good things she passed on...some of which were very good. I now enjoy talking to my daughters and wife about her. If I could go back, I would tell her that she needed to forgive my father and assume responsibility for any role she played. I would tell her to resume the practice of the Faith.

My father is a waste of time when it comes to talking about the divorce, even though we have come to a kind of reconciliation. I have forgiven him, but I know what kind of man he is. He views his remarriage as something of a divine right, and he is convinced that my mother "poisoned his kids against him." He has a high opinion of himself. When I've told him of the pain he has caused, he has responded with, "But that was so long ago!" Like Herod with John the Baptist, like King Henry VIII with the Pope and Thomas More, and like the Pharisees who crucified Christ, my father gets very, very angry at any suggestion that his remarriage was wrong...even though it, also, ended in divorce. His second wife even ended up testifying against him in a criminal trial that sent him to jail for 10 years. He enjoys the

respect of many prominent men, including prominent Catholic churchmen, and I believe he is headed for hell if he does not turn his life around. I say this even as I hold no ill will towards him. It's just how I see it.

Anyone who says that children of divorce are contributing their stories here because of "unconscious revenge," is, quite frankly, full of sh\*t. I have often thought of writing a book along the lines of this one, precisely for what I understand are your reasons: giving a voice to unspoken pain. The Church has done a miserable job about making clear the evils of divorce, at least in the United States. The reason I have not written such a book is because it could have too easily turned into my own personal "bitchfest," laced with anger. Better to let you do it. [58]

What I would say to them is that I get it. I understand. I wish that it had been different, that they hadn't allowed the alcohol, Vietnam, and their woundedness from a thousand little hurts to come between them and the family they had made together. I don't want revenge, and I don't want any more hurt to be visited on them. I don't know that they required my forgiveness. Instead, I had to learn that I wasn't responsible for their marriage not working. I often find myself wishing that they had the support of the Church and her teachings, as well as the love of Christ through His loving Mother, to console and comfort them when they faced tough times. My father took his own life in 2006, and we were never able to discuss any of this. [52]

I would have wanted to tell them to grow up and handle their problems so that they didn't ruin my sister's and my childhoods. I would suggest my father join AA and that my mother see a therapist for her problems. Mostly, I wish they'd been able to keep their problems from us and that they hadn't been so hostile with each other. [17]

I wouldn't want to say anything to my parents about their divorce. I'm not going to hash up that anger. I let them know my feelings on marriage by being an example (I hope) of a devoted Catholic wife and mother. [33]

Well, I did tell my dad that I thought what he had done was awful. I was really beginning to understand that I was angry with him, and so when he called to apologize, I was honest. He then asked me to apologize to my brother and sister on his behalf. I declined.

I would tell him that his actions wreaked a lot of havoc in our lives. I have been mostly interior in how it affected me, carrying it more quietly, but neither my brother nor sister seems to have really gotten to the root of their pain. My sister has never married, and my brother is on his second marriage—having left the Catholic faith years ago and not marrying initially in the Church. He has frequent bouts of depression and anxiety and is a recovering alcoholic and drug addict. I believe that our parents' divorce and the subsequent abandonment by our father are at the root of all of this. [8]

When my father was old and alone (yes, that third much younger wife left him), he told me that if he had it to do all over again, he would never have left my mother. At the time, trying to assuage some of his guilt, I told him that I wouldn't have my younger siblings if he had not divorced my mother. But, honestly, he shouldn't have divorced her. He should have stayed and had more children with my mother. [18]

I've tried talking to my biological dad, and a time or two my anger and frustration with him has reared its ugly head; unfortunately, it does no good. He is a "do as I say, not as I do" type of person, and although I pray for him daily (for his conversion and for my ability to forgive him totally), he doesn't seem to want to change or grow. He likes his carefree way of living...I believe they call it a Peter Pan complex. If I had the chance for him to truly hear me, I would ask him why I wasn't good enough, why my sister wasn't good enough, and why my brothers

weren't good enough. I would ask him what it was that made my one particular half-sister so special...and yet, there it is: I'm envious of my baby sister because he *wanted* her, he's *there* for her, she was "planned"—and the rest of us are just the product of his poor decisions, with whom he has to interact from time to time. He ruined my relationships with my siblings because of his choices; we hardly know each other. With my "adoptive" dad...there is no talking. He gives me the silent treatment, and he gives lip service to my brothers. Sadly, he is on a path of loneliness from what I can see. My mom and I are at a place where we can and do talk about choices made: What, if anything, could've been done differently; where we have and haven't grown; how and why the family is broken. These are hard but good conversations. She tells me she's proud of me and where I am in life, and how I'm doing things differently with my children. She laments her own life sometimes, wishing she could make different choices. Then we pray that God will continue using our hardships to help us grow closer to Him...because that's really what it's all about; Knowing, loving, and serving God in this life, in order to be happy with Him forever in Heaven.

As to those who have not forgiven their parents...I understand. This is something I am always struggling with myself. There are times when I think, "Okay I'm good," and that I'm past whatever heartache is there...and then I turn over another stone and, *Whoa Nelly*, there's a whole nest of new grievances to overcome. Sometimes I.Do.Not.Want to forgive them; I feel justified in withholding forgiveness for x, y, and z reasons. That's my pride talking, because forgiveness is not easy for us. So, the one bit of advice I can give, which I received from a priest friend, is: Pray for them. Let God do the heavy lifting. Simply tell God that you haven't forgiven them and that you *need Him* to help you heal. Soon your simple prayer for them will deepen, and one day you'll realize the hurt isn't so bad anymore. The scars may always be there, and a tear or two are bound to fall, but let God help you through it...He really wants to! [55]

I adore both my parents, and, though I have suffered greatly through many things, I would do anything for my mother. Hopefully I can break Dad out of Purgatory, and they will one day get the chance to reconcile. God does not take the love of a son lightly, I trust. [51]

Divorce does affect children, no matter the age. I do forgive my parents for the choice they made. Their divorce followed the pattern of their marriage, i.e., my mom calling the shots and my dad just going along with it. I am happy to see my father happy and at peace now. He lives alone, but he is a hands-on grandfather, and my kids adore him. I am now able to have with him the relationship I didn't have with him growing up, because he was just so depressed and oppressed by my mother.

My mom and her new husband live about four hours away (which is probably a good thing for our relationship!), but it's still awkward, and I have a hard time ever saying that I have a stepfather (and four stepsisters). It's just weird, since all of this happened only seven years ago. Explaining their divorce to my kids is also something I wish I didn't have to do. It stinks. I don't want to criticize my parents' choice to them, but I also don't defend it. I just speak to them plainly about what a sacrament is and how we're called to honor it, even when it's tough.

I have told my mother in the past that I think it's sad that they made a commitment before God, their family, and their friends to uphold their sacramental marriage, and they did not abide by that. She defended her choice, of course, and said that God wants her to be happy, etc. I think God wants us to be *faithful* above being "happy." In being faithful we find our true joy. We aren't promised happiness in this life!

Incidentally, my parents' divorce was amicable—not ugly, greedy, or dirty like I've seen in other divorces—and they get along very well now. So, go figure. It shows that they're capable of getting along, right?! [30]



I understand that my mom only did what she felt was right at the time. The fact is, it was not what was best, and it hurt me profoundly. A child needs security, and I never had that. I'm hoping to break the cycle here and teach my children that it was not and is not okay. [66]

Honestly, I'd go way before the divorce and try to convince my mother not to marry my father. Not that I don't want my life or feel like I shouldn't be here; it's more because, as an adult, I see how much my mother had to suffer and overcome, and I hate that my father put her through that. I hate that to this day if you were to ask her, she'd say that she never got over my dad and that he scarred her for life.

I'm confident that my dad didn't understand the impact of his actions at the time, but, if I could go back to the time of the divorce, I'd attempt to make him understand that his actions have the power to make or break us, and that his unfaithfulness and resentment toward my mother doesn't just speak to my mother, but it speaks to his daughters. I would also want him to understand that he could choose courage to lift up the women in his life or crush our sense of worth and trust in men for the rest of our lives.

There isn't much to say to my mother back then, except that I appreciate her trying to encourage my dad to make amends. I'm sorry that she fell in love with an a\*\*hole, but I'm thankful to be here.

If I were to speak to my parents about it today, I would show my mother empathy, because she wanted her marriage to my father to work, and she loved him dearly. To my father, I wouldn't know where to begin, except to just hammer him with questions: *Why do you continue to deny your unfaithfulness to my mother? Why do you manipulate others to gain their sympathy? Why are you allowed to play the victim when you're the one who left? Why are you so selfish? What made you think that an affair was worth throwing us out the window for, and how could you assume that we'd land on our feet, unscathed? Did you even care at the time? You know that I'm emotionally detached from you, right? I had to detach, because you continuously hurt me by trying to manipulate me by using guilt—playing up my “obligation” as your daughter to have a “normal” or “close”*

*father-daughter relationship. Do you know that there are times that I hate you? Do you know that what you've done to me causes me to sin against myself, you, my husband, and my children, and your actions put my soul at risk for eternal damnation because sometimes I can't forgive you? Most of the time I wish I had been born to a different father. Do you know that I still suffer, even though you keep moving on? Do you know that I remember the night my mother caught you red-handed in your affair, because she took us with her in the middle of the night to track you down at that cheap motel? Do you know the neon sign is embedded into my brain, even though I have no idea what the letters say? Do you know that I remember the altercation between you and my mother, as my baby sister screamed in her car seat? Do you know that I'm aware you emptied the dual bank account you had with my mother, leaving us no money for food, clothing, or shelter? Do you know that your mistress and her daughter were cruel to me and my sister behind your back? Did you ever think about how my mom felt when she had to send her daughters with you for entire weekends, knowing that during those weekends we were being mistreated and influenced by your mistress, who despised our mother?! Do you know how much psychological damage you've caused and further allowed because of your subsequent marriage to an evil woman? Do you know that I almost attempted to talk your current wife out of marrying you, because I like her better than I like you? Do you know that your current wife reminds me of my own mother? You're a fool! [44]*

I'd tell my dad that he should have never cheated on my mom. I'd also tell them that they shouldn't have fought so much and should have gotten help. They got married at 18 and were married for 20 years. They could not have children, and they adopted me as an infant. I'm pretty sure I have forgiven them both, so revenge is definitely not a factor. [60]

I would say, "Choose God, and put Him first." [34]

I can't speak to the person who thinks participating in this book is "unconscious revenge"—maybe that person's conscience is accusing him or her.

I have spoken openly with my mom, dad, and stepmom about all of it. They absolutely know that I love and forgive them. Funny enough, my dad won't talk about his infidelity, but he knows I know about it. I don't pressure him; I do, however, talk to him about forgiveness that can be found in the confessional. Also, I've talked about how he and my stepmom are in an invalid marriage because there was no annulment of my parents' marriage. Again, no pressure, just speaking the truth. I don't do superficial, but I'm also not mean. I love them all to pieces and have a great relationship with them all. They have a great relationship with my husband and kids, and we do all birthdays, Thanksgivings, Christmases, and Easters together. [41]

My healing comes from God, and I see no possibility of that kind of healing happening with them, through my efforts. I have forgiven them a long time ago, as they are also products of their families, which were not good models, and they are products of the decisions they have made. They are not seeking wisdom on these issues, and so my imposing it on them would be unwanted.

My motivation to communicate with you or others through this book is not because of "unconscious revenge." I specifically want to share this information for those who are considering marriage, and especially for those who are supporting their friends and families in marriage. I do know people now in the situations my parents were in, and I *do* tell them the truth in love! It matters that all of us understand these things. [15]

I would probably ask my parents, *Why didn't you go to counseling? Why, Dad, did you continue to stay with the other woman? Why didn't you try to fight? I appreciate all that you did for me, to help make my life not as crazy, but...you get along so great! Why couldn't you have done that when you were still married? Fight harder! Work at it more!* [9]

I would like to say to my mother that her lack of forgiveness toward my dad—and toward me for going to live with my dad—only

destroyed her and any relationship she could have had with me. Her desperate attempts to make me reject and hate my dad only made me reject and hate her. It was only through Christ that I was able to come to forgive her and not hate her. And to truly come to that point, it required the sacraments of reconciliation (confession) and Holy Communion, as well as Eucharistic adoration, to truly remove all bitterness from my heart, soul, and spirit.

I would like to say to my father that I wish he had fought harder for his rightful visitation. More than that, I wish he could have held on a few years longer in that miserable marriage so that I could have stayed with him and not had to live with her alone. I appreciate the patience that he endured in what was an unbearable marriage for him; I do not blame him for divorcing my mother. When I did go to live with him, I wish he had not coddled me so much. He did this to try to make up for what I had endured living with her after the divorce, but this coddling did not prepare me well for the real world, where it is so easy to have one's feelings hurt. [45]

I have been slightly more open with my parents, particularly my mother, about the pain of the divorce, but it is a hard topic to broach. I was taught, and it was repeatedly emphasized, that the divorce was a good thing. Without it, I was told, my mother never would have been whole or happy, and therefore (in her mind), I also never would be whole or happy. To discuss it with them is to be "accusing" and would open old wounds for no gain. I don't want to hurt or go through the pain of explaining myself, nor do I want to force my mother to accept the damage that she did to us; it would cause her significant pain. I have certainly forgiven my parents. They did the best they knew how with the tools they had. No one prepared them for marriage, and, to this day, neither of them understands what marriage even is, much less what it takes to sustain one. I don't want to get revenge...I just want us all not to hurt. [67]

I was an adult at the time of their divorce, and what I did say to my parents was that I would still love them; that would not stop. And there would be no choosing of sides. I told them I would also never agree with the decision. With one of my parents, the initiator of the divorce, a long discussion of “what God wants for me (that parent)” ensued. Our viewpoints were different, though I chose to remain objective, truthful, and never on the attack. If I were a child, I would love to just yell, “You are so selfish!! It never had to be this way!” Having a good marriage myself, I would love to guide them. So much of their pain or ignorance could have been different.

As for revenge: Why would anyone want revenge? Pain for pain? To forgive, we must choose acts of love over and over again, because their divorce, in their minds, is not about us kids. They are in enough pain as it is. Writing these responses for your book should be therapeutic, not a way to “get back at Mom and Dad.” [56]

If I were not a result of their marriage, I would recommend that they not get married in the first place. Neither was ready to enter into it. [61]

If I could say something to them today? I just want them to be together. And nothing can set that right again.

Would I want to say something to them back then? Yes! *Stay married!*

I don't feel angry with my parents, just sad. If my parents were together, I would move back to my hometown. Instead I'm raising my kids away from all of it—the children from my mom's second husband's first and second marriages, the “great-grandparents” that I've never even met—all of that. No matter how forgiving I am, the reality doesn't change, and the false sense of “we're all family” is not reciprocated by all the children and step-children—the whole mess of us, “related” through a string of marriages. In my mom's situation, she wears a mother's ring with nine stones and proudly tells people that, yes, it's true, she has nine children. But her husband's daughter from his first of three

marriages has never even met me. I doubt she considers me a sister and an aunt to her children. So, in the eyes of the re-re-re-married spouse, all the children from the various unions are "family," but, as adult children of broken unions, we hardly see ourselves as siblings and part of the same family. I see those other people as the children of my mom's second husband's marriage with his first wife. And I definitely do not consider myself as having eight siblings. I have two, and that's it! [46]

I'm having difficulty answering this question. Since my mom has passed, sometimes I do talk to her and say, "See? This is what my life is really like. I'm not doing a good job. Pray for me." I guess I would go back to my grandfather and say, "Hey! Don't cheat on your wife!" And then to my dad, "Please don't do what Grandpop did." I would advise prayer, counseling, and actively trying to heal their marriage.

I would tell them: *You did love one another at some point, I'm sure. You were idealistic in your faith. Let it move from your intellect to your heart. Resist the devil and he will flee. Don't try to be perfect. Put your wife before those bible study people. Sacrifice, lay down your life. Be less in the world. Love us for who we are. Stop listening to that quack, [Fr.] Richard Rohr.*

As far as the "unconscious revenge"...maybe? I thought a lot about responding to your questions. I wanted to write down all the reasons I was angry and still am angry and evaluate why divorce is so bad. I've said the words "I forgive you" into the air, in my head, but I still have a lot of anger. Like, I can look at my husband and hate him, and my dad and his dad (who killed himself), all while at the same time wishing for men who lead and protect and comfort. I know in reality that we are all sinners and that I don't recognize half the grace I receive. I don't want revenge on my dad. I want him to understand that he turned away from God and that he left the Church—the Truth—for sex, for adulation, for selfishness. I want him to understand that he could have loved my mom more. Or, if in all honesty, there were grounds for annulment, that out of respect for his children, he could have gotten a declaration of nullity and lived a celibate life. I could have understood

that more, and I probably would have felt more healing if I'd seen his sacrifice of living alone. My mom was very difficult to live with...but maybe it was because of my dad's lack of care and respect for her. There's always a nagging feeling in my marriage that it's not sacramental, because I am unwilling to let go of my protective force field of anger. But I also read that we have a sacrament until the Church tells us we don't (through the annulment process). I'll go with that. [23]

I have come to an interior peace about what happened to our family, but I was very hurt by the fact that, from a young age, I was told they were never going to get a divorce. Even now, having to split my time between parents makes life very difficult. I want to spend time with both of them, but it makes our relationships very confusing when I'm with one and then have to go to the other. Luckily, I still am able to have a relationship with them both, and I'm thankful that my mom has been very careful not to make me the middleman in conversations. If one parent has questions, he or she calls the other parent directly. [35]

I have told my dad some of the many ways his leaving has affected us. I think that it led to the early deaths of both my brother (suicide) and my mom, as well as problems with the rest of us, such as substance abuse, depression, and a lack of self-worth. I would tell my mom that she maybe should have communicated better and not been so stubborn and jealous with my dad, but, honestly, I do feel like he was 90% of the problem! [54]

I don't think there's anything I can say to them now. They've moved on. I am trying to forgive my mother, but it took me until age 30 even to recognize my own feelings, which I had buried under layers of Oprah tropes and self-help blah-di-blah. The strange thing is, I feel both sympathy *and* resentment towards her at the same time. I sympathize, because my own marriage is so hard, and the first time I left my husband, I felt like Elsa on top of the North Mountain, so I can

imagine how she felt when she finally got to be free of what she saw as a crushing burden. On the other hand, I resent the fact that she believed and still believes her actions were right and good. They weren't. They were wrong.

I guess I would tell her: *What is right isn't always what feels good, and what is wrong isn't always what feels bad. Sometimes the right thing to do is the hard thing. It's hard to live with a spouse who is not the most understanding, but how much do you understand or sympathize with his life? Yes, you were home with four children, one with colic, one with an undiagnosed learning disability and behavioral issues, and that was really lonely and stressful and hard. But he would be up at 5:30 am every day to go weld girders in -30° temps. Neither of you were champion spouses; you did the best you could. But it wasn't hard forever. We moved west, the job got better, he got sober, the kids got older, you both got therapy...and then you gave up. Just when things were getting better, you gave up.* [4]

I forgave my dad a long time ago. He repented, and we have a pretty good relationship now. I never held the divorce against my mom since she really had no choice. She was a Protestant raised in the tradition that divorce can and does happen, especially when there are affairs. She knew the effects of the divorce on me, and she bore all the guilt (more than her fair share, I believe), so I never really sat her down and specifically enumerated each and every issue I suffered with. I never thought my dad was capable of understanding how I felt growing up, being as narcissistic as he was. I don't think I would've told my mom to stay—there was no helping my dad to see how much he was ruining our lives. [39]

I have told my mom how she did not protect me as a young girl and how the divorce affected me. She knows, and she is sorry, but she said she would have ultimately still left my father, as nothing else she could have done would have made a difference. I would tell them to *never* have an intimate romantic relationship after the divorce while the children are being raised. It's adding insult to injury. Sacrifice your



love life for your children, since you couldn't make the love life that resulted in your children work.

I would advise my mother to be much more physically affectionate and open to my father's affection when they were married. I think that would have been very healing for the marriage and given it more of a chance. Looking back, I can see my father was starved. And I would tell my father to remain faithful to my mother and do everything and anything he needed to do, including getting off drugs and alcohol, to make his marriage work.

I do remember seeing another woman in my father's car shortly after their separation. I bawled myself to sleep. Not even my grandmother could make up stories for me to believe it was just a friend. She could give me no comfort. I was in a pain that was indescribable. Divorced parents... *No dating!!*

As for "unconscious revenge" and "we haven't forgiven"...I have forgiven my parents. It does not take away the pain endured at that time. I no longer live with that pain, but that intense pain was there and will always be a part of my childhood experience of my parents' divorce. [1]

My parents never asked me my opinion on the divorce. I believed that my feelings were unimportant to them at the time, which was the source of my anger. I would tell them that I need them to work things out, and that if they couldn't, they needed to let things cool down for a few months or even years before officially divorcing and moving on with other relationships. It felt as though little to no effort was put forth in trying to salvage their relationship and family. [65]

As a Catholic, I would tell them: You should have tried harder, gone to more counseling, abstained from emotional cheating, and never assumed that the other person knew what you were thinking. I would tell my mom that she was the only one who "won" out of the whole thing—so if that's what she was hoping for, she got it. I feel

everyone else lost in some way. I'd say, "I'm happy if you're happy, but don't think that happiness didn't come at a cost." [38]

I believe my mother did an amazing job of trying to be a good wife and mother, but my father's alcohol problem was too much. They were young and from different backgrounds. Maybe Dad should have received treatment and counseling for his alcohol, and they both could have tried counseling for the marriage. I actually wrote my father a letter at the suggestion of my counselor, telling him exactly how I felt about him. It was very powerful in my healing. I have since forgiven my father and have mercy in my heart for him. I know he had a tough life growing up, and I understand better why he did what he did. I am not excusing his behavior, but I have empathy for him now. I am not sharing my story with you out of "unconscious revenge." That surprised me to hear you say that someone said that to you. I never blamed my mother in the divorce, as she stuck by her children. [36]

I would have yelled at my dad for being a horrible and despicable person who had so much and threw it away. I would tell him the exact same thing now, because it's still true. I can only hope that God forgives him. I am working on forgiveness for him, but, truly, I am still filled with hatred for him and am so grateful that he was finally caught and imprisoned for the monster that he always was.

The only thing I would have said to my mom is to leave him sooner. And now I would tell her that I am so grateful for her love and care of my sister and me, grateful that looking out for us gave her a reason to leave her abuser. [68]

I have already said everything I could want to say to my mom. She is easy to talk to. She does not get defensive. There is no tension there, and she is a great parent. I've told her how hard it can be, and she mourns with me and shares some of her own perceptions of my struggles. I've also thanked her for being an emotionally mature adult who truly mothered us...she let us be kids and let us be ourselves.

To my dad, I'd like to say, "Please own up to your choices. Own up to the fact that you made a harmful decision. Yes, God has still blessed us in many ways, as God tends to be great at bringing good out of bad, but please don't use those blessings as a way to deny us kids our feelings, our experiences, and our realities. I am glad you've found happiness, but please accept that my happiness about these matters will always be mixed—and I honestly think that is a healthy response! Also, please be my dad, not some guy looking for me to make you feel good about your life decisions. Please protect me, your daughter, instead of hoping I will make better the dysfunction that I can't control."

To any divorced parent who thinks that a child speaking of his or her pain is somehow failing to forgive or "taking revenge"...that mentality will likely only cause distance between you and your child. Speaking as a Catholic, our faith does not teach us that forgiveness is the same as accepting, justifying, or feeling positively about something or someone. In fact, needing to forgive in the first place shows that a wrong has been done to you...and the consequences of that wrong aren't necessarily easy crosses to bear. I think too many parents equate healing and forgiveness with acknowledging only the positives of a situation, and that isn't healthy.

Speaking from personal experience, there are few things in my life that have hurt me more than when my father insisted I deny the wounds caused by the divorce. Even our marriage preparer—a priest with one of the highest-level degrees in the world in Catholic theology of marriage and family—had the compassion and wisdom to acknowledge those wounds. Acknowledging them was healing, not devastating, and was key to me being able to marry at all. What was devastating was my dad's insistence that by acknowledging the wounds, I was just sinful or unforgiving. Nothing good has come from those interactions. Having a good relationship with a parent should not be conditional on the child agreeing with or approving of everything the parent has ever said or done, especially on matters as profound as divorce. [40]

I wouldn't give my parents any advice. And, yes, I have forgiven them for the "crucible" of my childhood. I have come to be grateful for it, because it helped shape me into the man I am. But it took a few years of counseling to get there, and a growing maturity and wisdom that comes with age and perspective.

Bluntly, I would tell the young divorced parent with the "unconscious revenge" idea to focus on why he or she wants to shift blame. It doesn't matter whether that person is right in that thought or not. Divorced parents should focus on the damage they have caused in their divorce and the blame they have for their actions; they should not judge someone else's motives in sharing their experiences. Their first reaction should be compassion for the other soul's pain, not an accusation that the child's motive is revenge. [3]

My parents' divorce has directly impacted my life then and now! It impacted me then, because I learned to lie in order to get attention and make each parent happy. I also purposely got into smoking and then drugs to get their attention; I did these things right in front of them. That lifestyle led this 17-year-old girl to a 26-year-old man who abused her and kept her from her family. I ended up pregnant. When I finally got the courage and figured out a way to leave, I had to forgive not only myself for getting into that situation, but also my parents for their selfish behavior.

And it's impacting me now, because I'm watching my dad kill himself slowly with alcohol.

I've forgiven my parents. I have a wonderful relationship with both of them, but that was because I chose to be the bigger person and to let things go. Just because I've forgiven, that doesn't take away the pain, especially when I see that my dad still can't put me and his grandkids before his drinking. [6]

In regards to "wanting revenge" on my parents I have this to say: I have worked too hard on myself, and how to articulate myself and my feelings rationally, to be dismissed as some angsty girl who wants to

inflict pain on those who hurt me. I don't use my pain as a weapon. Healing is a longer process than just forgiveness. "Forgive and forget" is a terrible phrase, because for something like this, you never forget. You can forgive, but every decision you make will be informed by what happened—and that hurts a little bit. Does that mean you haven't forgiven? People aren't perfect. We aren't like God, who wipes the slate clean—who even makes the slate new—after we reconcile ourselves to Him. [37]

I think that I have forgiven my parents, but the hurt remains. It lives on in the uncomfortable interactions we have as a family when one grandparent comes to visit and one of our preschoolers has questions about why they live apart. It lives on in awkward dinners when we go to their area to visit, when they seem to get along just fine but can't manage to live together—and I can't explain that to my kids. [7]

I was just a small girl when my parents divorced, but, many years later, after my second son was born, the devastation over my parents' divorce and the subsequent hell they put us through with the custody battle came on full-force for some reason. I "had it out" with my mother, telling her how selfish I felt she had been, and especially how much she had hurt me—not only by the divorce, but by the abandonment of moving far away when I was so young. At first she was defensive, but eventually she owned it. She apologized and admitted that she had done everything wrong and that she wished she could go back and do it over again, very differently. At one point she broke down in tears and begged my forgiveness. I was still angry, but her apology went a long way to beginning the healing process. To this day, she still apologizes for it, and I know it has caused her great grief and regret. I have absolutely forgiven my mother, and I have a good relationship with her today.

I wrote my father a letter about it (I never had the nerve to say it directly to him), and he later called me and apologized for the divorce

and what it did to us. He said he had never wanted a divorce and that my mother was the one who pushed it. I believe him, but I also believe that he was as culpable as my mother, knowing how he treated her and how messed up they were. Today my relationship with my father is still somewhat strained.

Accusing one's children of wanting "revenge" for a divorce is ridiculous. If children feel the need for revenge, there must have been some serious wounds inflicted. Either way, the parents need to own it and accept that their children were deeply hurt by their decisions. [43]

I was young when my father left my mother—not so young that I did not understand what was happening, but young enough that I did not have all the facts. Through my own memories and questions asked as an adult, I have largely figured out what happened.

My parents should have stayed together. Looking back, I can see the slow dissolution of their marriage, but I can also see that the divorce "escape hatch" enabled that dissolution. There were no abuses, no horror stories. My parents simply grew distant to the point that my father's heart moved to another woman. Modern mores allowed him that latitude. In a world of no-fault divorce, each instance of temptation is magnified. That escape hatch looms larger as the heart slips away.

With all love and understanding, I can say that my father acted selfishly, but it is not entirely his fault. The Church teaches the importance of a well-formed conscience, and my father's conscience was formed by a society that does not value marriage in the way it used to and that sometimes even exalts divorce. Many even extol the "virtues" of a mixed family, insisting that stepfathers or stepmothers or stepsiblings are a good that must be embraced and celebrated. [5]

If I could go back in time, I would exhort my parents to work on their relationship with God. I would beg my father to keep the promise he made to my mother about not running for office again if it was too hard on her. I would beg my father not to split the bank account, but to

compromise with my mother by putting aside some savings and making it possible for her to go back to school—even if it meant putting aside politics for her to do so.

Regarding those who have not forgiven their parents, I would strongly recommend seeking a spiritual director or a counselor who can help them come at least to a point of interior forgiveness, if reconciliation with their parents isn't possible. The demon of divorce loves to haunt the hearts of its children. [24]





## Chapter Six

# What Society Should Know

*“What do you most want adults in our society to know about how divorce affects the children?”*

I want adults in our society to know that divorce affects children profoundly for the rest of their lives. Most parents would never want to do anything to physically handicap their children, yet divorce may well emotionally handicap their children in such a way that forming normal, healthy relational bonds is particularly difficult.

Divorce also collapses the normal safety net and security (not just physical) that is necessary for young men to launch out on their life's mission, which involves risks. It helps destroy the bond that is necessary between a father and a son, a bond that enables the son to transition solidly from a boy to a man and all that entails. [32]

It hurts. [34]

Just that it is devastating. So unless there's severe abuse, it is a very bad thing to do to your kids. [21]

There is no recovering from it. Children can adapt; they can learn how to navigate the split-life of divorce. But there is never a recovery. In that way, it is like addiction—there is only “recovering.”

What hits me the hardest is that there is no “going home” anymore. I have my wife and mother-in-law and our home, but there is no childhood place to which I can return. When parents in intact families move to a new house after the children grow up, there is still that place to go where the two parents act as they always have: Mom makes Dad a drink at the end of the day, Dad chops firewood while Mom cooks dinner, the same Christmas decorations go up (albeit in different places), Dad cuts the ham, and so on. Familiar smells with familiar activities. For children of divorce, all those reminders of the home they grew up in are gone. “Home” isn’t really a place, after all, but an experience. With divorce, that experience is immediately gone, with no warning or preparation. Suddenly the world consists of “Dad’s weekend,” and the awareness that this year is Thanksgiving with Mom and Christmas with Dad, because it was the opposite the previous year. It may even seem a rational split to the parents, but the child knows. The child knows that everything is now different. Who gets my birthday? Both, I guess. It’s not two birthdays, just two separate halves that don’t add up to a whole. [5]

It hurts, it hurts, it hurts. But worse is your desire to “move on” and pretend that my first family never existed, and that half of me no longer exists. You take the photos of the other half of my family tree down, and you imagine I don’t notice or care. I do notice, and I do care. That’s half me; that family really did exist, and it really is important to me. Just because you want to move on doesn’t give you the right to erase half my family. First families matter!

And for adults in intact families: It has been extraordinarily frustrating to try and argue this issue (meaning, the importance of family structure) with people from intact families who also believe in the “choice” for adults to do whatever they want with kids’ family structures. It is a bizarre sort of “win-win” for them. As children, they received the benefit of the socially conservative family structure. Then by supporting divorce, gay marriage, etc., they get to appear “open-minded” and “tolerant” about others’ sexual choices. They didn’t live

through what they advocate, and I find it absolutely maddening to deal with their hypocrisy. [26]

I want adults in society to know that divorce *will* affect the children negatively. They *will* have to learn to cope. A child of divorce has a disadvantage in life. They just do. Maybe those children can overcome it—many do!—but they *will* need help. [57]

Divorce breaks a chain of both future-building and legacies of the past, which the next generation would normally benefit from. When this continuity is broken, the culture itself fragments—and it happens in one or two generations. The betrayal of divorce pulls the rug of security and commitment out from under children, and they in turn do not believe in commitment nor do they have the tools and example to be successful in a long-term relationship. The ability to overcome the more destructive elements of human nature is damaged or ruined. [47]

If I had to address today's adults about the effect of divorce on children, I would say, with great compassion, that I realize things don't always work out despite everyone's best efforts. There are good things that have come from my parents' divorce. Neither is the perpetual rage-aholic they were when I was growing up. They both have cultivated new lives that include the practice of their faith. I cannot stress enough the healing effect of the annulment process, and I am grateful for a Church that acknowledges that some impediments indeed invalidate marriage.

But there is a negative flip-side to this, one that entails genuine suffering, and one that our society has yet to adequately address.

The most negative effect divorce has on children, even and especially the adult ones, is loneliness. I don't just mean the physical loneliness of either Grandpa or Grandma (my dad or mom) not being there during a holiday or event; I mean the staggering emotional loneliness of trying to figure out what it means to be a spouse on your own. Simply put, if you can't talk to your parents about what it means

to be married, then who can you talk to, really? Add to that isolation the fear of repeating history in your own marriage, and it's little wonder that adult children of divorce find the pressure of marriage unbearable themselves. We are completely and utterly alone in trying to make something work that we've only seen fail.

But what about books? Dr. Phil? Catholic Radio? Couldn't we learn from them? Well, yes. And no.

In my master's program, I studied St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. I have absorbed all that the *Catechism* teaches on the sacrament of marriage. When I was engaged, I read popular Catholic books on marriage. If you want an intellectual explanation of what marriage is, what it was always intended for, how it should be lived, what it represents, even what it is supposed to look like, I could give you those. I pretty much "know" everything about marriage. I have a base to appreciate and revere marriage, and the Church's teachings are just beautiful unto themselves.

Living it, though? The truth is that no matter how much one can learn about marriage, *nothing can substitute for having the first-hand example of your own parents living out their marriage together*. In practice, it still takes, well, practice—sometimes monotonous, fatigued, embittered practice. There is genuine suffering in marriage, and I don't know if we, as a Church, are doing all we can to give married couples healthier ways of dealing with those sufferings than the world does.

This is what I want adults in our society and our Church to really reflect upon: Aren't all of us responsible for helping those who suffer? I am completely serious when I say that care for those with marital problems should be at the forefront of our ministries. Without healthy couples, how can we have healthy families? Without healthy families, how can we be a healthy Church? It's just not possible.

I'd also like to share with society the example of my in-laws. My husband's parents, though not perfect spouses, are still together. My husband definitely reveres the unbreakable bond of our marriage much more than I do. It humbles me that in the almost ten years we've been

married, he has never been the one to threaten divorce. I only wish I could say the same. [13]

The heartache and strife that comes with divorce is so not worth it. Even with cordial divorces, the kids silently suffer. Two Christmases, separate family gatherings, two birthdays, two Easters, etc. You can dress it up as fancy as you like but it is *exhausting* for kids. Being shuffled back and forth like cattle, having to learn two sets of rules, having two sets of friends (those at Mom's and those at Dad's), having to worry about how Mom is going to react if I ask Dad to take me to the father/daughter dance, or how Dad is going to react if I don't want him to take me clothes shopping—these and countless more scenarios go through kids' heads. It basically boils down to this: We want to keep our parents happy so they don't leave us, too, like they left each other; whether the split was easy or hard doesn't matter. [55]

I would remind adults that marriage is not only, or even primarily, about the spouses. It's also about the children. Divorce always affects children, more often than not in profound ways. The problems of divorce should really be resolved during the "courtship" phase. If you aren't certain you can take the possibility of divorce off the table, you probably shouldn't be getting married. [12]

I want adults in our society to know that divorce does affect the children. Regardless of how messy or neat the divorce is, it hurts the children more than adults might think, and for longer. I want them to know that while they may think it's their only option—that divorce will be better for everyone, that therapy is too hard or won't work—they do have options. Divorce is definitely not better for everyone, and, although therapy is hard, it's so, so worth it. It can work if they just keep looking for the right therapist. [22]

If scientists and other experts had reliable data untainted by ideology, they would have sounded the alarm long before I was born.

Everything the smart people think they know is wrong. Stop divorce, any way you can. [51]

What would I want adults in society to know about the effects on children? I would want them to know that divorce does affect them, period. Many kids will seem great but will keep their feelings to themselves. Other kids will actually be okay after the divorce but will be hit hard when they start their own families. Adult kids have every right to challenge their parents' decision to end their family. They have a right to know what happened and how hard their parents tried to make it work—at least I think they do. [28]

I want adults to know, first, that marriage is a covenant with God. We say to each other, “in good times and bad times...till death do us part.” I feel parents really need to look at those words. Divorce does affect children, mostly on the inside, the part people cannot see. I longed for my father’s love and guidance, along with my mother’s. She gave the best she could. He left us. I would like to have seen them work through the tough stuff so that I, as a child, could have learned how not to give up so easily—and witnessed the blessings God has on the other side of the storm. I got to see that with my own daughter, when my husband and I went through our own tough time. She was 11 years old, and she watched as God mended the brokenness and blessed us. Later, in high school, her religion assignment was to write about a time when she experienced God during difficulties; she wrote of when He healed our marriage. She shared it with us, and it brought tears to my eyes. She had learned how great God is when she watched Him save her parents’ marriage. What a life lesson and witness to her! [36]

I’d want them to know that divorce is likely affecting their kids in way that they, the adults, can’t see or understand. [60]

Divorce is a cycle that is hard to break away from. It is selfish. Divorce is not a once-and-done occurrence; it’s something that you live

with in the back of your mind some days, but on other days it jumps out suddenly, without warning, and bites you with *huge* pain. It could come as a longing for an anniversary party or a cousin's parents' celebration that you and your siblings can never replicate. These things hit home unexpectedly. [14]

When a marriage is broken, the foundation of the family is broken. Instantly, everything becomes more stressful and complicated. Finances often become a real concern, child support becomes an issue, and one spouse may no longer receive healthcare benefits through the ex-spouse. Each parent now becomes a single parent in a sense, and now two of everything needs to be purchased for two households. Not to mention, what if the parents are no longer in the same city? One parent won't get to see the children as often. The role of each parent is important in bringing up a child, and most often it is the mother who gets custody. When a girl grows up without her father and the healthy sense of self-worth that only he can give her, she may begin to look for that self-worth in all the wrong places. Scientific data has proven that girls who grow up without their fathers in the picture have higher rates of teen pregnancy.

Also, no-fault divorce (I'm not talking about divorce due to abuse/dangerous circumstances) is contributing to a very hopeless society—one that views love as a fleeting, conditional *feeling* instead of a conscious *choice* to care for and serve others. I've heard so many people in my life who are children of divorce say that they will not get legally married, that they'll just cohabit and "make a personal commitment" to each other, and that "they will know they are married and that's all that matters." It's almost like a defense mechanism—they know the pain and suffering that happens in divorce, so they feel that with nothing "legal" to take apart, any breakup that comes would be easier and cleaner on themselves and their children. [49]

It affects us more than you know. I have always heard that children are resilient and will be fine. I think people believe that because

children are good at adapting and pushing things inside and hiding them there—but there is a difference between adapting and recovering. Divorce affected me in ways that I could not conceive, and at the strangest of times, but the most noticeable effect was in my perception of what a marriage meant. [59]

The kids are not [expletive] all right. Stop telling yourself that. [4]

Kids, young kids especially, won't see it coming. I didn't. Kids don't remember fights and angry looks at each other. What they will remember is the day that Mommy and Daddy sat them down and told them they're getting divorced. They will know the day, the time, what they were wearing, what chair they sat in—everything. [37]

IT DOES AFFECT THE CHILDREN. STOP SAYING WE'RE RESILIENT. (Sorry. I'm not yelling at you; I'm yelling at them.) Support the parents, but don't write off the kids! It's okay to make someone mad if that's what happens when you *tell them the truth*: Don't dishonor a promise you made before God! Don't split your child's world in half!! Just don't! [29]

I want them to know that no amount of justification will change the fact that divorce does irreparable and grave damage to the psyche of a child and fundamentally changes the course of the child's life—and almost never for the better. Divorce fosters an underlying feeling of mistrust and self-blame that will last a very long time, possibly forever. It makes a child feel unimportant and cast aside. Honestly, my parents' choice to break up our family made me feel inconsequential; that, more than anything else, is why I became so angry at my parents when I had my own children. I couldn't understand how anyone could do anything that would make their child feel that way. [43]

I just think that the effects are real. It doesn't mean they won't be okay, but why should they have to go through that? [50]



Divorce affects them for life. Their worlds will never be the same. Divorce isn't a one-time event, but a situation where one family sets out on two ever-widening paths...and those two paths will have to be navigated by the children for life, especially in low-conflict "good" divorces. I don't want to be discouraging; I just want adults to understand that for most kids, it will never be a simple matter of "getting over it." Being able to acknowledge that can make all the difference for a child. Don't sugarcoat it; don't tell them their family is just another form of diversity. Please help couples stay together, and please support keeping families intact. [40]

Divorce strips away all the protection and emotional well-being that parents can gift to their children. [70]

It doesn't just affect the children, but their children and their children's children. Divorce has tentacles that are far-reaching. Each severing and reattachment brings with it a whole extended family (which might also be broken), and the connections become more and more tenuous. These are houses built on sand. [46]

A. I think that most people don't understand the impact that a divorce has on a child's view of relationships. I can say from personal experience that having a family that was broken gives me a distorted view. I am skittish to enter a relationship, fearful of the same result.

B. Parents may have had therapy to try to work out the marriage, but I think it is also important that the children have a therapist to talk with, as it is an emotionally difficult time. It helped me very much that I went to the same therapist as my parents, because he already understood our situation from talking with them and thus was able to help me more. [35]

I suppose that the natural answer is that I want everyone to accept the Church's teaching on marriage! If we consider it a sacrament that binds us for life, if we take it more seriously and live chaste<sup>2</sup> lives up

until—and through—marriage, I think our own well-adjusted children will give all the evidence needed on how our marriage impacts and influences them. [33]

I want people to find out what true happiness is. I want them to know that keeping their family as a unit is so much more powerful than they know. I want them to understand that if we take all the energy we give “to the world”—whether it be helping others or our own endeavors—and put that energy toward meeting our husband’s basic needs and being more present to our children, we can change the world! Parents, do not underestimate the power you have in influencing your children toward the virtue of commitment. Even if that is all that they learn from your marital struggles, it will be powerful! [20]

What would I want them to know? Your children deserve better. [66]

Children are deeply wounded when their parents abandon their marriage covenant. We—the children—become so insecure and have profound issues with intimacy and trusting people. We grow up lacking the skills to negotiate and problem-solve in all of our relationships (not just romantic), because the message we got as children is that people leave each other when things get too painful or difficult. We fear abandonment, and we often sabotage our relationships for fear of getting too close to someone and getting hurt all over again. [63]

I want adults to know that their “happiness” *is* their children—that their children are a worthy cause, much more worthy than their quest for self-satisfaction. I want adults to know that children are not “resilient.” Children are fragile. Children need to know their parents can problem-solve together and build a life that honors their commitment to God and family. I want adults to know that children do

not do “fine” after divorce. I want them to know that the scars of divorce stay with them and even move on to the divorced parents’ own grandchildren, because a lot of the same toxic behavior is transmitted to the next generation. I want them to know that divorce divides and separates a child into millions of little pieces that can never be put back together. This will indeed follow them into their own marriages and poison the waters of their own well. It is a vicious cycle of sin. [64]

It's painful, and the pain never really goes away. Kids lose their foundation, their home, their stability, and that affects how they see the world and are able to relate to it. Trust is more difficult, and nothing ever feels stable or long-lasting. [25]

A family that is broken and separated in divorce exists not for the benefit of society, but rather acts like an injured appendage of society, and thus a limitation of it. If you wish to be the change that you want to see in the world, start with yourself and your marriage. Heal the injured appendage first. Divorce won't heal it.

When we normalize divorce, we tell people that our marriage was bound to fail—that other marriages are easier—and that easy marriages are the ones that have value. This is a pretty effective way to encourage people to absolve themselves of their own wrongdoing, and to point the finger at the other person. Similarly, making excuses for putting your marital relationship on the back burner is the quickest way to justify your future divorce. And the divorce that results will be a lasting legacy of dysfunction for your children. It will be the inheritance you leave them, and it will scream louder in their ears than any other thing you taught them.

If you grew up in a loving home that was not impacted by divorce, you are, in ways that you can't realize, taking your family for granted. Not because you mean to! You just lack the vantage point I have. The solidity that you feel in life, faith, and love is rooted in something that a child of divorce does not have. Innocence and virtue can grow when a child is allowed to mature at a normal pace. That is not the case for

children of divorce, who must mature quickly and often develop stress triggers that impact their everyday lives in substantial ways (emotionally, sexually, physically). Those ways may or may not be visible to you, but they are there. And there is a toll to be paid by society—and not just fiscally.

When divorce is the foodstuff that nurtures a society's members, that society grows in dysfunction, not virtue. When the family is dissolved, the seed to grow insidious things is planted. No one benefits from cracking the foundation of a child's family. Yet parents who willfully divorce each other are always guilty of holding and swinging the sledgehammers in that child's life. Divorce is costly, and it has a wide fallout zone. The child is always ground zero for the damage. [69]

I guess I would want adults in our society to know that not every marriage works out, but it sure as hell should work out more often than it does. Divorce is hurting children who then become adults who hurt their children. It shouldn't be accepted as normal. It shouldn't take you three times to figure it out. Marriage should be supported more. More bishops should call out for men to step into the breach. More money and time and effort should be put into helping support and encourage healthy marriages. Marriage is truly the building block of society, with so many rippling effects, good and bad. [23]

If someone has to separate due to physical safety for themselves and/or the children, then by all means they must separate. However, most divorces are a very selfish act, and the person who left because of an affair, for example, is more than likely to do that again. It leaves behind a very messy scenario for children, who end up with step- and half-siblings and are left wondering where their loyalties lie. There is a lot of pain and heartache for the children, no matter what age. I got the best of my dad when I was little—he was never that good of a daddy again. I have siblings who never talk to one another—what really is

considered a family gathering? Which aunts and uncles can you turn to? Which cousins still consider you family? [18]

Divorce doesn't just affect your immediate family. It's a curse on the next generations as well. That sounds dramatic, but all you have to do is look around to see that it's true. It sends out a ripple that touches many lives in very destructive ways. [53]

Divorce says that love is conditional. Divorce is the antithesis of God's love, because it is not redemptive. It says, "I give up on you. You are a lost cause." [65]

I'm a *huge* supporter of staying married for the children!! GASP! Perhaps the adults will fall back in love doing so. Maybe it's the children and commitments they will fall back on that will keep them focused. One issue hardly considered is that the child of divorce is still left with whatever problems the divorcing parents leave. So, instead of a *married* drug addict father, the child has a *divorced* drug addict father. Instead of watching *one* hard marriage, the child has to watch *another* hard marriage, and another. Not to mention all the live-ins—new boyfriends and girlfriends, just all of it. So terrible for children. And the new spouses never love the children from the original marriage like the bio parent does. We feel it. We know we are in the way. We know we are just residue and evidence of a failed union.

If there is no danger or unrepented infidelity, stay married please. And, if you don't stay married, commit to no love life until your children are grown and gone. [1]

Divorce is not a one-time event that kids get over; it has a lifetime ripple effect in families. Divorce is not only an indication of dysfunctional and unhealthy adults at that point in time, but it also creates more dysfunction and pain as life progresses and moves on. Kids have to spend their lives navigating it, and in gaining new perspectives when they marry and have their own kids, they have to

reprocess it and relive it. More than anything, kids want their parents to be adults, to work through problems like adults, to stick to their promises, to put family and responsibility above their changing feelings, and to teach them about virtue, holiness, and love in a way that makes sense. Kids want to see their parents succeed in the important things in life, and they want their parents to teach them how to succeed, too—marriage being of the highest importance. If these things don't happen, then kids spend a lifetime trying to reconcile two sides of a family that their parents couldn't reconcile.

Kids don't often have the words to describe how they feel, how to address the confusion. As they are growing up, they may accept things as they are and even say really positive things about the divorce, but they often don't gain the vocabulary and perspective to even begin to articulate all they are experiencing and questioning until well into adulthood.

Finally, I want to say to the parents who are divorced: Be careful of how you speak to your children. I see all these people talking about their dramatic situation and blaming the marriage or the other person, but kids see the reality of their parents as they age. They see who is likely reasonable and courageous, and who is a coward justifying his actions while dragging the other person down. They see the characters of their parents. They don't care so much about the official annulment, the later valid marriage, or a parent's supposed "rightness." We, the children, are weary of the defensiveness, because defensiveness places the focus and attention squarely on the defensive parent, ignoring or forgetting all the other people involved. Defensive parents do not seem to perceive that it's not always just about them, their situations, and their justifications.

If parents face the reality of suffering as a result of past choices, they can save their kids a lot of pain. If they are too busy defending themselves and trying to prove that everything is "as it should be," they are going to create a lot of extra pain for their kids. If they think this isn't a lifelong conversation or process for their kids, they are kidding themselves. Again, parents need to be careful about how they approach

the question of the divorce and its aftermath, both publicly and with their children. Otherwise, many of these defensive, justifying parents could face major relationship problems with their kids in adulthood. [16]

Get over your selfishness and learn to suffer with each other. The etymological root of “compatible” is “to suffer with” or “to suffer together.” [61]

My advice to young married couples would be to surround yourself with like-minded people—don’t seclude yourselves. I wish I had known that as a young wife. People need other people for accountability and fellowship. It’s so important to address the damage that divorce inflicts. The world makes it sound so “normal,” but it’s not, and it shouldn’t be. [27]

I’d like adults to understand that there are so many consequences, both immediate and prolonged, that impact the kids. Besides the pain of the family breaking up, there’s a feeling of being less secure in life. There’s the usual, inevitable “new families” scenario, which causes such a disorienting sense of alienation in kids. It’s hard to form healthy bonds when you feel abandoned or like you will always come second to the parents’ desires. There’s a need for the parents’ love and attention on one level, but, on another level, there’s a simmering resentment. Kids need solid roots, and divorce always severs those roots. I really do believe that a lot of the chronic emotional and psychological issues that people deal with these days have their origins in a broken family. [39]

The repercussions last for generations. My grandmother had to leave her husband. My mom did not have a good example and didn’t know what to look for in a spouse. She married someone who needed help and was Catholic in name only. I didn’t have a father or even a grandfather to look up to. [19]

Be patient with people for what they have been through. I would say to avoid divorce, don't enter marriage too quickly. If you have a lot of emotional issues to deal with, work on fixing yourself first, before marriage; accept that marriage is not the key to happiness—God is! Marry someone who loves God more than you, otherwise, that person can never love you enough. [45]

Most adults try to excuse their decision to divorce by saying that the kids want their parents to be happy, kids are resilient, etc. These things may be true, but children want a happy family unit with *both* mom and dad. They want that above all else. They want parents who love them *and* they want a family. My happiness is not what's most important to my children, and that's how it should be. Divorce leaves children feeling scared, insecure, angry, depressed, and confused. [17]

To explain it simply: It is more harmful than our culture has admitted. In many ways, it has set a weak precedent for same-sex marriage. Because we haven't admitted to ourselves the full truth and painful complexities of parental abandonment, we, as a culture, think that we can toy with familial structure without consequence. That is another lie built on lies.... [8]

I want adults in society to know that divorce tears children apart. It destroys the fabric of who they are. It permeates every aspect of their lives, even if they themselves don't acknowledge how deep the impact is. [52]

When we live in a society where divorce is an accepted norm, is it any wonder our children so often turn to bad friendships, unhealthy romantic relationships, sexual activity, pornography, and drugs and alcohol? What are they looking for? Love. They want to be loved and they want to feel loved, and the love they want in their youth is the love only their parents can give. I felt so crushingly alone from about seventh grade until I graduated from high school, not because I didn't



have good friends (I did), but because I felt that whatever I was suffering in my life, I had to suffer alone. I knew in my mind that my parents loved me, but the lack of love they had for each other felt like a vacuum in which any other love in the home suffocated and died. I really felt like I was on my own, and I felt like my parents were so concerned with how angry and hurt they were with each other that if I had come to them with my own hurts and struggles, I'd just be a bother. So I wrote in a journal, wrote poems and stories, and suffered silently. [24]

The effects of divorce are permanent and forever. It also affects grandkids. Life will be more difficult. [48]

I would like adults to realize that divorce is almost always going to profoundly hurt their kids. The kids will be more likely to engage in risky behaviors, to do poorly in school, to have poor job performance and be unable to keep a job, to have bad relationship skills, and to miss out on getting married and/or have trouble staying married. They may end up looking at the world through a negative light. They may choose to not have kids or they may get abortions—in other words, they may kill your grandkids—and their reason will be that they don't see the point of bringing children into such a terrible world as this. Kids of divorce are also more likely to commit suicide. [54]

I think that adults need to know that even a separation without divorce affects the extended family and creates awkwardness and confusion where previously there was closeness. Our family will never be the same and has only grown more distant as years have gone by. [7]

Divorce is ugly, and it will ruin children's lives. I wish more people would realize that. [62]

I think divorce is one of the most, if not the most, devastating thing in world. I think we should fight it at all costs, save for cases where a spouse is under the bondage of drugs or alcohol, or where there is abuse—and even then, I'd really hesitate to quickly abandon a marriage or suggest to someone to abandon a marriage. All of the assaults on marriage are so completely demonic, and I believe it is the root of all evil in society today. I still walk with a limp. Divorce is a vacuum which causes me great insecurities in most areas of my life. I can almost physically feel that void at times. Throughout the years, I tried to fill that void with things, mostly unhealthy things. But now, I try to fill it with prayer, offered suffering, abandonment to God...and sometimes ice cream. [42]

Divorce causes long-term damage to the children involved. It forces a child to choose one aspect of himself over another in every situation. Beyond that, it pits the two families against one another, forcing even more “choosing.” If a child is constantly aware that half of him is unacceptable to one parent and that parent's family, how can he ever find himself acceptable or trust a partner who claims that all of him is acceptable? By the way, in just reading over that last sentence, it seems so matter-of-fact. It's impossible to convey how truly debilitating and soul-wrenching that ingrained “unacceptability” becomes.

Another thing that I wonder if the adults in society think about: My parents are aging, and I will have to figure out how to look after them. My stepdad is 80, my dad is 75, and my mom is 70. One is in the Southeast, and two are in the Southwest. Dad is declining quickly, with serious issues emerging. If they were still married, I could move them into my house in the next few years and look after them. They can't live together. I have no idea how to stretch resources, especially time and attention, to look after all of them. I am racked with guilt and worry that I won't be where I'm needed, when I'm needed. [67]

I think divorce is a huge reason society is the way it is. Parents of divorced children are constantly replacing "love" and "time" with objects and with buying things. These kids don't need objects—they need morals, they need values, they need love. They need their parents to decide to love each other and stay together unless there is danger of death.

I also want to mention the spiritual and practical aspects. First, there are demons that attack the family. I think those who feel despair should have their house blessed again and be prayed over. Second, there can be hormonal issues and health issues that need to be addressed. Women lose testosterone or they go through hormone fluctuations in perimenopause, and they don't realize that depression and anxiety can result. And men get anxiety when they have so much on their shoulders. These things need to be checked and can be made better! Don't let the weight of the world ruin what was once so good. [6]

Too many people are "swimming in Lake Me." With lack of faith, narcissism and selfishness have flourished. Kids are left behind when adults pursue their own happiness without trying their hardest to work through the challenges. The cycle repeats itself. Children learn to toss away what isn't working and start fresh, make another go of it. There isn't enough effort...it's just too hard. As Catholics, if we're truly faithful Catholics, we expect it to be hard. Don't be lazy; be an active participant in your marriage. [38]

There is no such thing as a clean, friendly divorce. There is always damage—unfortunate but true, though sometimes the damage caused by a separation may be less than if they stayed together. I think it comes down to the people involved... [3]

To a child of divorce, parents' broken marriage vows are a life sentence to insecurity and emotional instability—period. Even if the adult child doesn't recognize these insecurities or emotional

instabilities as coming from the divorce, it's all there, and it all stems from the breakup of their foundation: their family.

We increasingly hear happy parents and stepparents proclaiming, “We all go together to the kids’ soccer games!” and “Co-parenting is awesome!” via photos and articles that go viral on the internet—a celebration of blended families that lulls fence-sitters into thinking that a divorce won’t be so bad for the kids.

But I was that kid, and I had great anxiety as a child athlete in a divorced family with stepparents. For example, I once had a stepparent ask me why I would hug my mom first after a game before hugging anyone else. So the anxious self-questioning begins: *Who should I hug first? Will the other parents be offended? Who should I go sit with? Should I ride home with this set of parents or would that upset the other parents? Oh no, both sets want to take me out for ice cream afterwards—who do I go with? Which set will be less offended if I don't choose them? Who should I ask for money for a snack?* (Once, a parent told me to ask a different parent for snack money, because the different parent “doesn't pay for enough as it is.”)

I remember the time I got hurt in a game, and only one parent was allowed in the x-ray room with me...but all the parents were there! *Who do I choose?* I chose my mom, and my stepmom rolled her eyes because I didn't choose my dad.

All that I have just described is anxiety surrounding *only* a sporting event in the life of a child of divorce. It does not even touch the surface of the real-life anxieties that children of divorce face—even into adulthood. Despite the smiling pictures applauded online, there’s not so much of “awesome” there as there is of “injustice” toward the child. [44]

Divorce damages children. Badly. In ways no one can predict. Keep in mind that you might never get your kids’ respect back, and you are setting your kids up for a lifetime of confusion, pain, and maybe poverty, jail, and institutions. Or suicide. Or failed marriages. And more pain.

In my own family of origin, my older brother is a lost soul. He has two divorces under his belt and kids from two different marriages. He even has two kids three months apart (think about that) by different women, one conceived before he even divorced his first wife. He is currently shacking up with a 54-year-old girlfriend who is going on 16, and who still wears miniskirts and displays ample cleavage...who is also divorced. Two of his four kids don't talk to him. Another has confided in me that he can't stand his father's girlfriend, and I have told him that he can always escape to my house when needed. My brother's second wife is a loony toon (that's who he had more kids with). His first marriage was clearly annulable, and not just because it wasn't a Catholic ceremony. (I did not attend either of his weddings, and not on Catholic grounds, either. I wasn't even a practicing Catholic when he first got married; I just knew it was a joke.) He has no religious faith of which to speak. Like me, he has a fine Eastern prep school education, and, unlike me, he has an Ivy League degree. He is a lawyer with an MBA. He is in debt, and as far as I can tell, he doesn't have any real peace. He's a nice enough guy, but he is clueless.

My younger brother made a serious suicide attempt a few years after my mother's suicide, and two weeks before my wedding, at which he was to be the best man. He is beyond lost. The last normal thing I ever remember him saying was, "How could she do this to us?" after they got him out of the hyperbaric chamber to remove the carbon monoxide from his blood due to his suicide attempt. He has never married. He has been involved in serious sin, but it's not as though he would have understood it as such, as neither I nor my brothers were ever taught any morals growing up. He is seriously messed up, and he does not speak to me. I don't know if he speaks to my father or my other brother. He has a degree in economics from an Ivy League school. He is financially destitute.

My family of origin is fractured, broken, and is really not something I like to dwell on. It is a mess. Most people don't understand how badly damaged it is and how badly damaged we are. [58]

Divorce skews a child's entire life. It's not normal, however much our society wants us to think that. Learning to overcome their personal circumstance takes up so much of the child's heart that it is very difficult to rejoin the world in a normal way. Your whole world has been ripped from you, and you think you will never be or feel normal again. That is too much for children to take on. It makes kids grow up too fast. We need children today to have a childhood with happy memories to draw from. Divorce inevitably denies that, because it takes the idea of wholeness away and replaces it with self. [68]

Adults need to know that although they want everything to work out for themselves, it may not work out so great for the kids. Divorce is ugly—even the "good" ones, and I would consider my parents' divorce in that category. With few exceptions, kids want their parents together no matter what! [41]

Any child, any spouse, any parent can move on with actions of love and forgiveness should they so choose. But we, the children of divorce, will not forget the sting of disappointment and hopes lost—ever. [56]

## Chapter Seven

# The Role of Faith in Healing

*“What role has your faith played in your healing?”*

My faith has made all the difference. When I became engaged, I decided to convert (or “revert,” I guess) to Catholicism—not so much for me, but for my fiancé. At least that’s what I thought. As the years went by and I became more formed in the Faith, I began to realize how critical my marriage was to my becoming holy. I began to recognize the joy and holiness in serving and giving selflessly to my spouse, and the critical importance of the intact family to overall societal health and well-being. Had I not been Catholic, there is no question in my mind that I would have been divorced, and the pain and loss that had been inflicted upon me would have been inflicted upon my own children—by me. [43]

Pretty much all of it. I am frightened to think of what would have happened had I not converted when I did. I honestly think I would not be with my husband anymore, and I would’ve been a single mother to one child. But the Church reeled me in, God placed people in my path He knew I needed, and pastors helped counsel me through the tougher times of my healing. [66]

It has been really difficult for me to understand that God loves me unconditionally, because I had such poor examples of what that could

be like. When it finally started to sink in, it was life-changing. Every day I live for God, and I do my best to be obedient to what He asks of me. I fail a lot...but I let Him help me up, and I try again. The healing is ongoing...the learning and growing is ongoing. I love my parents, and I can be cordial and loving towards my “dads” even if they can’t or won’t reciprocate. And I’m okay with that, because I know God will hold us all accountable when our time of judgment comes.

I cannot thank you enough for this opportunity to voice some of the heartache that's been carried for all these years, and I pray that all who have been harmed by the scourge of divorce find some healing, even if they were unable to let their voices be fully heard. Divorce really has so many ripples...just like abortion, sadly. We're blessed that God alone can write straight with our crooked lines. [55]

My faith taught me that marriage is a vocation that leads me to unification with God. It isn't about “romantic” love or superficial happiness; true love is an act of the will, through which joy can be experienced. My faith taught me that I was right—marriage is impossible, unless you have the grace of God, humility, and a willingness to accept that it's about making you holy, not superficially happy. [67]

My faith has made it possible for me to forgive my dad and to be able to pray for him. Also many, many trips to confession have helped me to get over the issues I have had in my marriage—issues I believe are related directly to my parents' divorce. [50]

My Catholic faith has made my own family beautiful. The Church has provided the tradition and inspiration for what family should be, and what we want ours to be. The Church as our Mother and the priest as Father has been very nice for my husband and me. It has given us a sense of family, and obviously a huge sense of direction that neither of us received within our fragmented families. I take comfort in the fact that through our own good marriage, our grandchildren will



be able look up the chain and see couples together, loving one another, loving God, united for God's glory and the good of the children.

I love being Catholic. [46]

My faith is the bedrock of my existence. God has blessed me abundantly. I still struggle with generalized anxiety disorder as a remnant of the damage caused in my childhood; however, I also realize that it is at its worst when I am not trusting, not leaning into the Lord. Being blessed to wake up and serve the Lord every day as a Director of Religious Education has made it easier to stay grounded and focused on the Lord. [3]

My motive in sharing my story is that I would like people to know that God is always there. He has always been there for me, even in the many years of my rebellion against Him. Everything has the possibility for greater good. There were many small things along the way that were helps from God, all of which have brought me to a place of such joy in Him. Had I not suffered, I might never have known how wonderful my relationship with God could be. My faith—the sacraments, Eucharistic adoration, prayer (especially the rosary) and a good friend in a trusted priest—has done much for my emotional and spiritual healing. I have spent much time with a notebook at adoration, jotting things down, sobbing, and praying. This has been better than any counseling session could ever be.

In retrospect, I can see God at work from the beginning of my life. Every suffering either has prepared or is preparing me for something better. Without that suffering, I might never see how good, merciful, and wonderful God is. I would just take His goodness for granted. More than saying “poor me,” I wish to say “peace and joy from God is possible for anyone and everyone, regardless of what they have been through,” because I've come to that place. I also understand how hard it is for some to understand this.

Each situation is as individual as the person himself, and each soul has a unique story. This is mine:

I was not raised Catholic, but I was exposed to Catholic teaching from a very young age because of a neighbor and because of my attendance at Catholic school. I fell in love with God through church attendance with the neighbor and through my school. In second grade, I learned about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist as the class was being prepared for First Holy Communion. I never doubted that Jesus was present in the Blessed Sacrament, and at the time, it broke my heart that I did not get to receive Communion with my classmates.

I desired a Catholic baptism, but it wasn't until I moved in with my dad that he allowed it, and I was baptized at age 13. My Catholic faith helped me a great deal during my teenage years. However, I didn't actually understand a lot about the Faith. I was very bitter about how my mother treated me, and I thought my disrespect for her could be an exception to the commandment to honor one's parents. I believe this disrespect to my mother, the "exception" that I carved out for myself, was the most spiritually damaging thing that I have done. It left me vulnerable to spiritual attack. When I entered college, I was easily persuaded away from the Catholic faith. I quit going to church for almost for 10 years, and then I came back to Christ, attending Protestant churches. It took me almost another 30 years to visit the Catholic Church. When I saw the Host consecrated, it gave me a great desire to return to the Blessed Sacrament.

I made a confession, which changed everything for me. And that priest introduced me to the great blessing of Eucharistic adoration. Eucharistic adoration and honest confessions—acknowledging my self-pity and my lack of forgiveness—has been the key to redemption.

I see now that my second-grade experience was what God used to protect and guide me so that, at the right time, everything fell in place. I now possess the peace and joy that come from my loving embrace of my Catholic faith, and I am blessed with the spiritual and emotional healing that has been occurring for the past eight years, since my return to the Church.

God was there when I was seven, to bring me back when I was 57!

The furthest away from God I got was when my parents divorced. However, I went to a Catholic school and I would loathe when the weekends would come; I wanted to be at school with my friends and God. [11]

I was raised “Catholic,” poorly catechized, in the ‘70s and ‘80s. I didn't know my faith until I had our first kiddo at age 30 and finally found out about NFP (Natural Family Planning); the scales fell off my eyes, and I wanted to learn everything I could about my beautiful Catholic faith! Since we went to my dad's place every other weekend, we only went to Mass on and off, and of course I didn't really see God in the dealings with the divorce. Knowing my faith for the past 20 years has helped tremendously, and I cannot imagine my life without my faith ever again. My faith life has allowed me to grow in grace and mercy, and even more now, speaking the truth in love. [41]

My faith made me aware of my anger, which was buried for so long. I think my faith is also helping me let the anger go. Finally, God's grace is literally the only thing holding my marriage together. [4]

Reclaiming my Catholic faith has done far, far more than anything else in showing me exactly what marriage is, and the importance of remaining in it and working through it. My wife was raised a Protestant, and we were not initially married in the Catholic Church. But one day, about two years later, she came to me and told me she wanted to enter the Catholic Church. Since then, we've grown in our faith together, and while we do fight (and yes, at times the D-word is thrown around), we both know that the true nature of marriage is a covenant before God and thus “for keeps.” Having my own children, and raising them with my wife in our own Catholic family, has been the biggest facilitator in allowing me to shed and move past the scandal of having divorced parents. I think that if you truly come to know and understand that your spouse is a unique gift from God, you'll never contemplate divorce. [12]

Faith in God through Jesus Christ has been at the heart of my healing. I cannot imagine doing life (marriage, parenthood, anything) without Him. I'm still a mess in some ways, but I also am a new creation. Thank God! [21]

I have always had a strong faith, and through it all, God has never left me. But I do feel inadequate in my faith. I converted to Catholicism prior to my wedding—so that we could have the full Nuptial Mass—and I am still learning about my faith.

Am I healed? Does that ever truly happen? [18]

My faith tells me that I may never heal on this earth. To be perfectly frank, I am running out of hope that I will heal. It just doesn't end. And that's part of the frustration—we were told it *would* end, and it never did. So I place my hope in God. I have to rouse myself from time to time, but when I do, I feel confident that He sees every tear, He knows every ache, and there will be healing in His time, which might not be in this life.

Here's a problem: Our culture has a false belief that every problem can be fixed. But think about it—is that true in other areas? Isn't it true that some things cannot be fixed or healed? Of course it is. That's a fact. Some things are actually fatal. Another term for divorce, from the child's perspective, is "dismembered family." Okay, so that's bad enough, but remarriages are like taking a dismembered family, then stitching new limbs and other body parts onto it. So, yeah, that's a traumatic thing to live through. You can see how it would shorten somebody's life. And divorce actually does shorten people's lives.

I recently made up a prayer that goes like this: I imagine holding my parents' hands, and I say, "Holy Trinity, please repair my family; Holy Trinity, please heal my family; Holy Trinity, please restore my family." [26]

The cross I bear is my cross. I am thankful to God every day—and to whomever might have prayed for me—that my suicide attempts

were not successful. So thankful. I am so blessed to have the family I now have. [31]

My Catholic faith offers me a guide to a holy, healthy, and happy marriage. My faith is what gives my husband and me the strength to overcome our obstacles. So, the healing comes about when I can recognize that forgiveness is needed toward my father. Healing also comes about when I can bring all my brokenness to the sacrament of confession.

I want to add that, from a Catholic perspective, I really don't think people go into marriage with a full understanding of what it all means. Adults have this idea that the Church is there to bring them happiness, that their future children will be brought into the world to bring them happiness, that everything and anything they involve themselves in should only ever bring them happiness—and it's all a lie!! The Church, spouses, children, and all of life serve as nothing more than preparation for Heaven and showing God our unending devotion to Him! This life serves as a place to make us saints, to prepare us for our ultimate and final destination: union with God in Heaven. Overcoming these marital hardships are ways that we look beyond ourselves and turn our focus to God's desire for how He wants us to exist. God created us for Heaven, and, in light of our creation, we need to recognize that marriage was instituted to assist us in getting to Heaven, not to make us "happy" on earth. Walking away from an institution that was created by God and involves God is, through our works, a denial of God's love for us. [44]

I would say that the daily recitation of the rosary and Eucharistic adoration have been the biggest ways in which I have been able to work towards healing. I may have been aware of problems, being a child of divorce, but I feel that, in many ways, I am really just beginning to excavate those wounds and get to the bottom of things. [8]

As I began to authentically process my parents' divorce and the fallout from it, there was no real healing possible for me until I faced, head-on, my thoughts on religion. And when I say fallout, I do mean fallout. In every part of my life, there were consequences—emotional, spiritual, and physical. I paid a heavy, heavy toll. I found myself on my knees eventually because of it all, and that's where I found God in a real way, for myself, for the first time. He didn't care that I didn't know how to talk to Him. He didn't voice any disgruntlement that I felt like a giant fake for being a cradle Catholic, yet feeling completely uncatechized and bewildered at even attending Mass after the divorce. He just listened. For a long time. I had a lot of vinegar to get out, so that was exactly what I needed—an ear.

When I was all finished yelling at God for my circumstances and griping about how impoverished I was from the collapse of my family and losing any understanding of normalcy following my parents' divorce...that's when I started to engage in something more than a monologue with God. I had to be willing to give Him the ugliness I had before our relationship could grow. It was two steps forward, three steps back for a while. But talking to God felt like a release valve freeing me of incredible tension, and the light bulb moment for me was when I realized how relevant that analogy was to the situation I had been involved in with my parents' divorce...and that's when I started to learn how to listen and to understand the mechanism of my parents' relationship. Parents who divorce don't understand that children must dissect their parents' relationship to make sense of things; it was necessary for me to figure out my faith, their struggle, and my place in all of it.

By no means has there been a complete healing as I write this. I'm a work in progress to be sure, almost 20 years in the making as I type this. But I do have an authentic relationship with God, though it's fractured into exactly the number of pieces my family is. At some level, just realizing that helped me let it be what it is. I try. I show up. I do the work. I try to be honest. I admit when I fail at that. I don't expect that I'm a role model for anyone, ever. My suffering isn't special. My sin is

mundane, just like everyone else's. These are the things I ponder, to remind myself to keep an even keel so that I don't follow the dysfunctional lead that my parents set for me. I just want to find peace, and the only place I've ever found peace is in conversation with God. It certainly hasn't been in any interaction with family since the divorce. [69]

Without a very good pastor (Rev. Brendan Williams, now retired, Diocese of Trenton, NJ) and an exceptional wife (and I use the word "exceptional" deliberately) to teach me about what forgiveness is and what it is not, I would still be an angry man, and probably drinking to numb the anger (I am an alcoholic). The role of the Holy Spirit is very large in my life. I know that Christ is the Savior, The Great Redeemer. I largely experience Him as the Great Healer. And I cannot separate my faith from the Catholic Church, which I know is founded by God and the means by which God comes to men—all men, whether they are Catholics or not. There is so much healing that can be found in the Catholic Church. The sacramental life has been huge for me, as has Eucharistic adoration, where I often go simply to be with God and to let Him shine the light on the broken areas, so they can be healed. Sometimes seeing the brokenness has hurt...for a while. But God has put people in my life and has arranged circumstances so that I could heal—of that I am certain. [58]

My family prayed for my future spouse my whole life. Once I started dating my husband, I was determined *not* to see how it could work out. I thought I was destined for years of dating and half-hearted searching for that special, faithful man. I didn't want to love him, and I fell in love with him almost in spite of myself. I know God worked to bring us together.

Then after marrying my husband, I was allowed a glimpse of God's great love for us. I had the love of a man so wonderful, a love that I had never felt before. It seems like all good things are possible (and now we have a precious little one!!). I just have this idea over and over again,

that if a strong man can love me, and if I can love him so much, how much more does God love us? How much more is possible with prayer and faith? [19]

Without my faith, I wouldn't have been able to have a relationship with my mother. Without my faith, I wouldn't have been able to understand what marriage actually is, and then enter into a relationship with someone who not only agrees with those beliefs but who sustains me, holds me accountable, and will fight for our marriage no matter what. [52]

My Catholic faith has played a large role in my healing. The Church has high standards but offers endless mercy and forgiveness, just like Christ. I strive to model my life after Jesus Christ; therefore, I'm called to forgive and love. [48]

I was a non-denominational Protestant from about 17 years of age to 35 years of age. Protestantism almost mimics the culture of divorce, because when there is a disagreement within Protestantism, quite often there is a subsequent "divorce," and one denomination or church splits off from another.

I'd also say there seemed to be an attitude of, "Well, you're born again and you have Jesus, so that's all you need and you'll be fine." There never seemed to be any real cognizance or acknowledgment of the challenges children of divorce face.

I became Catholic when I was 35, and that was a real help to me. There seemed to be more of an acknowledgement in Catholicism that just because someone is Catholic, underlying problems or issues don't somehow magically go away. The grace of the sacraments and spiritual helps like the rosary have been a genuine benefit. My Catholic faith also helped me to focus on what my calling might be, whether marriage, the single life, or the priesthood. I only wish I had become Catholic years earlier; I think it would have been a great help when I



was younger by helping to orient my life in a good direction sooner. [32]

I basically reverted to the Church and was confirmed in 2010, a few years before the family destruction came to a head. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't been able to lean on my faith throughout the separation and divorce. At one point, my dad told me that I had a problem with the fourth commandment (essentially saying I didn't respect him), and when I went to confession and explained the situation, the dear priest consoled me, and told me to pray to the Holy Spirit for peace in my heart. It was the first time in years that I was able to feel relief from the burden of pain and anger. I looked more to the Holy Family and placed my trust and confidence in them. I am grateful for the Church's stance against divorce and against capitulation to things that damage people and families. [53]

First, the Church gave me the absolution I desperately needed. With that, she has taught me how to turn and forgive and has been my compass and my rock. The Church continues to teach me what is normal. I have searched her and found her worthy of my trust, even though the process has taken and is taking time. In Pre-Cana, I learned the all-important, "Love is a decision." It was life-changing for me. [20]

Becoming Catholic has put "marriage" and "family" into proper focus for me. I better understand what these words mean, which helps clarify my roles as wife and daughter. Somehow, understanding what went wrong with my parents helps me make sense of my own issues so that I can deal with them and move on. [39]

My faith has reminded me that there is always hope. While I may not be able to act on certain things, I can pray. And God can work from there. He is the only one who could bring them back together. Even if He doesn't, it brings me comfort to know that I can turn to God with

my concern and my hurt, and He will hold and comfort me as His daughter. [22]

My faith has helped me heal from my parents' divorce as well as from my own divorce. While I don't understand either divorce, my faith has helped me let go of the anger and move on. [17]

What role has my faith played? A *huge* one. Many of us siblings ran to Christ as our refuge, and none of us wanted to experience divorce ourselves. Only one out of eight siblings has divorced, and one received a declaration of nullity after getting married at 16. I knew that God never intended divorce, and the Church was a great support to my father. Christians have every opportunity to be the strength and foundation of our culture and society when they commit to an understanding of the sacramental nature of marriage. I blame in part Protestantism and its dismissal of the sacramental nature of marriage for the declining value of marriage. Marriages are incredibly durable with right counsel, practical helps, and a blanket commitment that is non-negotiable. A marriage *can* survive betrayal when the two regroup and recommit sacrificially—and it must for the sake of greater good. An eternal perspective is critical to the preservation of the marriage commitment, as is a passion for the next generation. [47]

Faith is central to understanding that God is love. God is the central force behind marriages, but some choose not to allow God to heal, challenge, or save their marriages. Christ showed His love through sacrifice. He is the model for marriage.

A lot of what my husband and I know about marriage and try to live out as best we can is St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, an understanding of which is *so* central to marital love. Sacrifice, the gift of self, the language of the body, etc....Oh, if everyone could know the Church's rich teachings on marriage!! [30]

There are so many reasons every day to praise God for my Catholic faith. It is where hope lies. It is where comfort can be found. It is where the conviction of truth will always be for me. If I am lost, my faith sets me back on the path. It saddens me to wonder just what a person does when faced with real, challenging hardship if he does not have faith. [56]

I converted to the Catholic faith when I was 28 years old. After a series of long-term relationships that I ended because I could not commit to marriage, I finally found the answers I needed in the Church. I needed to feel taken care of, to feel stable, and to have a "home." I realized I didn't have to figure out all the answers anymore, and I found a tremendous sense of happiness in knowing that being Catholic would last forever—my Church wouldn't break off, split, or reform. I also knew that I needed supernatural grace and power if I were to ever to get married, something I desired deeply but which seemed to evade me. I found that grace in the sacraments, which changed me into a person of faith. Although I had known and loved Jesus since I was a young adult, I had come to a place where I needed to experience God in the spirit *and* the flesh, which is what the sacraments offered.

When I became confirmed in the Church, I was overwhelmed by a deep sense of abiding peace. I surrendered a lot to God at that time, including my fears of marriage. Actually, He took those fears from me. A year later, I married my husband after a relatively short engagement. I had peacefully said yes to him, something I never thought I would be able to do. It was God's perfect plan all along. He can write straight with our crooked lines. [65]

My faith has been the main reason I've been able to forgive and move on in my life, embracing that this is the way things are, even though deep in my heart it saddens me that it ever happened.

It was through the experience of my parents' divorce that I fully realized what a hefty vocation marriage is, and that marriage prep should not be taken lightly.

I've also come to realize that, as our society becomes more secular, marriages will fail at increasing rates. How can we have faith and trust in our spouse, and trust in him or her through thick and thin, if we have no faith relationship with God? How can we be given good discernment tools in becoming a good spouse, in choosing a good spouse, or thinking about how this person will be a good parent to future children, if we're not building our lives around a faith that holds us accountable to something higher than ourselves, instead of idolizing and expecting instant pleasure in our jobs, the material world, even our relationships? I have too often seen couples rush to get married, idolizing the romance of the relationship and the "big day"—and they are already getting divorced, not even five years later. [49]

I became more involved at church, with women whom I saw to be role models—nothing like what I saw at home. [10]

My faith played a huge role! I learned about God's design for man and woman, a healthy, whole definition of marriage, and sacrificial love. It helped me understand redemptive suffering. It helped me understand that my parents' sins and flaws were not reflective of God and His plans for us. It gave me hope that I could succeed with God's grace where my parents had failed, and it gave me the road map to do it. [16]

Being Catholic has certainly helped me heal, but also reminds me that my parents' divorce will always be one of my crosses to bear. Fairly recently, I realized I have never attended a marriage talk without having to go through my parents' divorce. It makes me sad, and occasionally I can't sit through the whole thing, because I get caught up in thinking, "That's how it should've turned out."

On the positive side, though, my faith has been my greatest source of healing. It helped me see the pain I was hiding and helped me deal with it. When my father announced he was getting remarried, I went to one of my parish priests who helped me work through my thoughts and feelings. I find myself looking to Joseph in the Old Testament as a kind of model of my own life. Everything was cool one day, awful and terrible the next, but God worked through all that to bring about a great good. “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good,” Joseph said to his brothers (Gen. 50:20).

Another verse that helps keep God’s providence in my mind is when Jesus quotes Psalm 22 on the Cross: “At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Mark 15:34). I heard a great speaker at a conference ask us if God the Father was far from Jesus at that moment. Had God abandoned His Son, left Him alone to suffer? No, absolutely not. God was with Jesus during every last excruciating moment. So when I feel alone, as if God has abandoned me to suffer in the pains that life has brought me, I remember that He is there, and He can take any evil that comes to me and make a greater good from it. [37]

I have forgiven my parents, however imperfectly, and I am close to both of them. But I have realized that I can never count on them to be my protectors. Only God can fully protect us. Because I know these feelings of anguish and grief will be gone after I die, I am able to be alive and live my life as a Catholic wife and mother today. Had I not had my faith, I probably would have died from a broken heart or would be barely functioning today. [70]

My faith has meant everything. I was filled with anger and animosity before I became Catholic, and I fully turned myself over to God and His will. My in-laws made a huge impact by showing me what a true marriage was—that it included God and was about more than oneself. [59]

Because of my faith, I can accept myself and all my failings, knowing that I am loved by God. Therefore, I have been able to heal and to forgive so that others may heal. The Divine Mercy has been everything to me, and to my family. Without it, I doubt I could've ever been merciful towards my husband, my kids, or any human being. And then, of course, there's always the temptation to beat myself up for my poor decisions. Not so in Divine Mercy.

I also can't speak highly enough about how the annulment process was very healing to my family and my parents as they went through it. I am grateful for a Church that recognizes that what looks like marriage may not in fact be a valid marriage. I love that when things fall apart, the Church allows an opportunity for people to move on, to hopefully discover who they were meant to be. [13]

I largely worked my way through the divorce before coming to know God. However, I do believe God was there for me even before I acknowledged Him. [25]

I have seen my faith as a rock that I can cling to. At a time when my faith was very much under attack from the results of the divorce, just having a youth group and being around people with a firm faith helped to strengthen it. Being able to turn to the Church in my hurt and also turning to prayer were very important to me through the divorce process.

For me, partaking of the sacraments (daily Mass and confession, specifically) was a great peace. The grace from God given in the sacraments gave me the strength to deal with trials during the divorce. In addition, clinging to and memorizing Scripture was very comforting. I also read a great deal about the lives of the saints; learning about them and about how they faced trials with God's grace really helped me attempt to do the same. [35]

Our faith is our foundation. [27]

The role my faith has played in my healing...I now know what marriage is. It isn't about "being in love." It is about remaining committed. Just like when I don't feel like attending Mass sometimes, *I do*. Just like when I don't feel like making my kids lunch, *I do*. So, even though I don't feel like being married sometimes, *I am*—and *I do* what I need to do to fulfill my commitments and obligations as a wife and mother. So much of the "duty" part of marriage has been forgotten in today's society, but it is a *duty* and an *obligation* to each other, to God, to our children, to our families, and to society. My faith brings me comfort in knowing that I am doing exactly what the good Lord wants me to be doing. And, in doing so, He brings me His peace and joy. [1]

A huge part. The biggest part! God Himself healed me through His Church, and I am so immensely grateful for that gift. [57]

God alone has provided healing. Is it complete? I don't know. I doubt it, but I'm doing fine. Through my experiences, I have learned the value of understanding the nature of marriage, the importance of selecting a good mate, and the obligation to grow along with your spouse. Neither party in a marriage remains the same, and our vows are exchanged with a person who is growing and changing, hopefully for the good, but not always. Yep, big commitment. [15]

It has played the most important role of my lifetime. God is the only true Physician and Healer. By the grace of God, I know that I can overcome anything and lead a productive, happy life. In addition to the healing gifts of the sacraments of confession and the Eucharist, I do believe He has given us sage counselors to help us work through our woundedness and help us acquire those skills necessary to build a joyful, healthy relationship. At the top of my list would be the mental health professionals at Catholic Charities who have helped me/us greatly. [63]

The sacrament of confession has been the key in my healing process. [33]

Before the divorce, our lives were rich in faith. Our family, friends, and neighbors were all Catholic, and our lives were based around our Catholic school and the Church. After the divorce, we still went through the motions of being Catholic—CCD, Mass on most Sundays—but the faith itself seemed to have melted away. My difficult marriage, my strained relationship with my mother, and my pure exhaustion brought me back to my faith. Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). I took Him at His word. My husband's faith, too, has grown through all of this (and my dad has come back to the Faith!), but unfortunately our faith is a source of contention for my mother and several other very “progressive” members of the family. They remain Catholic, but only to a point! [28]

Ironically, it was my conversion and gaining of faith that brought forth my anger, or revealed what anger was there. Before my conversion to Catholicism, I had few, if any, absolute boundaries. Divorce was okay, especially because it happened to me. Looking back, I can see how angry I was, and how running from that anger put me in the position of excusing all divorces in an effort to keep from incriminating my own parents.

My faith gave me a new Father and Mother, my true parents. God and the Blessed Virgin are always with me. Scott Hahn talks about how an earthly family is “like” a family, and the Holy Trinity is the true family. He’s right. I have something now that gives me a guiding light and a goal to set. God and His Church help me and my wife to see what family should be, and we strive for that. [5]



I think of God the Father as the father who never fails. I could say I almost have no context for what this means—a Father who is only perfect Love—but revealed truth demands that I contemplate it. The *Catechism*<sup>3</sup> paragraph about human fatherhood presenting a challenge to properly understanding God could have been written about my life; painfully, I have seen ordinary men and their failures throughout all of my years. I'm still learning how to trust, but I am learning. In my brief time in the Church, I have met and befriended some amazing fathers. Also, I feel closer to my deceased dad now; I sense that our story is not over. [51]

I leaned into my faith. I spoke with a priest about my relationship with my dad and got spiritual and practical advice on how to deal with things. I have learned to drive on, because I can't change anything that has happened. My mom raised me with a good foundation in my faith, even if I wasn't the best Catholic for a while in my younger adult years. But I was able to draw from that foundation and build on it as I went through some of these challenges. I have been very up-front with my mom about how serious my wife and I are about our faith and raising our kids to be well formed, and I think she has, in some ways, been inspired to be a better Catholic (inasmuch as she can, cohabiting with a man for many years). So, I think in some ways their divorce pushed me further into my faith, as I had to embrace it fully for answers, support, and comfort. [38]

The only reason I'm able to be joyfully married and a mother is because of my faith and the faith of my husband. My parents' decisions do not need to determine my worth and my ability to love. [61]

I already touched on this a bit, but suffice it to say that God and Our Lady have very much inserted themselves into the holes left by my parents. Religious formation, spiritual direction, the Spiritual Exercises and my annual retreats...all of these have been so immensely healing for me. My sister is the only one of my siblings who still practices her

faith, and, compared to my brothers, I would say she has healed the most from the wounds of divorce. When I look at her and myself, I can't help but notice how our faith has aided our healing, and how our brothers, without faith, still bear the wounds. [24]

That's more complicated than I would like it to be. But my faith has played a large role. My faith has taught me the deeper, true meaning of sexuality, marriage, and family. It has prepared me for marriage in so many ways—had I not been Catholic, I might never have been able to function as a wife! I just didn't have a strong foundation from my parents, even with good remarriages (which is not totally the same). My faith has given me a Heavenly Father who can fill in the gaps where my parents could not. It has given me strength and supernatural grace to overcome weaknesses I have, some stemming from my fractured childhood. And it has put me in touch with resources that have been helpful.

The complicated side is that although my parents' marriage was declared null, that fact has not brought healing to me. I have had to overcome feelings of betrayal from my Church as I have tried to make sense of why their marriage would be null (harder to process, actually, than the legal aspect of their divorce), and I've watched some in my family drift away from the Faith as a result of the annulment. I think Catholic couples need to understand that although the annulment process is designed to bring closure to ex-spouses, it really might not have that effect on the kids (even if they intellectually understand it, as I do) or even on both ex-spouses. Basically, annulments won't solve everything.

I also have experienced my faith being used against me (“You aren't forgiving enough” when I express genuine feelings on my parents' divorce; “This was God's will” when I've expressed the hardships of divorce; or zingers like, “My real Catholic spouse...” in reference to the annulment and remarriage). Thankfully, the shortcomings of people within the Church don't have to deter me from living out my Catholic faith and finding healing through it! [40]

My Catholic faith played a major role in my healing, which is ongoing. I give all the glory to God! [36]

My faith has helped me heal tremendously! During a very rough period of time, when I had been married awhile and had a toddler, my husband got fired from his job and fell into a deep depression. I would come home from work to find my husband on the couch just staring into space, and my kid would be wandering around the house in just a dirty diaper—hungry, cranky, and neglected. My husband had tried to get physiological help, but it wasn't working. That's when I finally asked God to please, please help me. He did! We returned to Church shortly after this, and things have gotten exponentially better! I still have some issues from being an adult child of divorce, obviously, but I finally do feel more secure and unconditionally loved, not by a human, but by God. That takes the pressure off my spouse! And vice versa. [54]

A huge role. God made me feel loved when no one else did. [60]

My husband and I are together today because of God. When we were at our lowest, we both came back to Church. We had done so many things wrong; however, the one thing we did right was marry another Catholic. We fought a lot, but coming back to Church was not a problem; we both knew Catholicism was home. We went to confession and found a community of support...we grew in our faith, and our marriage just got better and better! He is the healer of all things...and without God, I am sure we would not be together today. [64]

I didn't realize what faith meant until my own divorce. I don't think faith played a big part in my life growing up. I went to church every Sunday and was a cradle Catholic, but I didn't understand. My father was studying to be a priest when he was younger. He was no

role model. I didn't understand what depth there was until I had to find it myself. [14]

My faith has played a huge role, because it has taught me to forgive, it has taught me to love, and it has taught me what a real marriage is. [6]

I have finally found the grace of forgiveness—and I am working on it. Forgiveness is not something that is just done and complete like a book; it's ongoing. Different things come up at different times, and I find I have more to forgive.

I found out about redemptive suffering when I became a Catholic. I had no idea that Jesus would care so much for me that He would take on my pain—redeeming and transforming it when I offer it to Him in union with His Cross. The incredible healing that redemptive suffering provides has changed my life, and, without my Catholic faith, I don't think I ever would have come to know forgiveness of any kind. I finally know that true healing is freely given through Jesus Christ. He has received me as the prodigal son was received; He has healed me through His Body and His Blood. [68]

A huge role. I could write my own book on this. I have been in touch with an amazing priest who helped me forgive my parents and everyone else who has hurt me, one by one, by name. I still struggle with the image of God as a loving father because I have not successfully kept a loving father in my life. I don't think I'll ever understand that image while I am alive, however, I have faith that it is true. God is a loving father who will *not* abandon me. It's just hard to feel confident in that. [29]

I don't know that I am healed from my childhood, from my own decisions, from self-loathing, or from codependency. I have certainly grown and experienced God in many ways. My faith is important to me, but in a very desperate kind of way. The Holy Spirit is real, and

God's angels are real. If I didn't have my faith, I would not have anything to restrain me from doing a lot of destructive things. I struggle, I wrestle with God. I obey, but I lack joy. I can vividly remember the time I was alone with my baby when I was 18, and I was experiencing intense emotional pain and loneliness. I wanted to die. I cried and cried and wept and asked God to save me. I wanted to be held and comforted. I wanted my parents. I wanted a family. I wanted to be loved wholly. God physically picked me up in His arms that night, and a complete peace came over me. I fell asleep in His arms and woke up for another day. I know He is real. I know He is there. I can't go on without Him and His Church, and I have faith that He saved me, He is saving me, and He will save me. [23]

I think that the importance of forgiving my parents has been helpful, and trying to pass along the values of our faith in the areas of marriage and family gives me great hope that our own children will be able to stand strong in their marriages. [7]

I have been able to forgive. [34]

I was born on May 13 [the anniversary of the Blessed Mother's first Fatima appearance], 1959, at St. Mary's Hospital in Tucson, Arizona; I was taken care of by the sisters there for seven days before I was adopted out; our wedding gospel reading was the wedding feast at Cana....Our Lady has truly been the salvation of my life. If not for her intercession, and probably the intercession of my three martyred babies, I have no idea where I would be.

It was while driving home to my husband and two girls from an inquiry class I was taking that I realized the Church was home. I really don't remember the subject of discussion that night. I was just driving, minding my own Protestant, semi-Bible-thumping, Christian-Scientist-formed, inquiry-class-participant business, when I heard the most beautiful, angelic music. I still don't know if it was in my head or not. At that moment, I knew that the Angel Gabriel was behind me

and the Blessed Mother was beside me. And I knew in a moment the truth of the Faith. I joined the Church that Easter Vigil. We were all sitting in the last row when Father proceeded towards us from the altar, baptismal candle in hand. He smiled and winked at us and said, "Are you ready?" I was. The choir began the Litany of Saints, we stood up, and I came home. [42]

## Chapter Eight

# To Those Facing Divorce

***“What would you want to say to any children facing their parents’ divorce today? What would you want to say to those parents now considering divorce (absent those cases of danger where separation is necessary)?”***

To the kids: *It is not your fault, it is not your fault, it is not your fault.*

To the parents: You made a commitment to one another—for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. Well, right now you are experiencing worse, and your relationship has a sickness. You owe it to one another and your children to fight the sickness, to come out of this valley and be stronger together for the experience. Ask yourself, have you given this relationship every effort? Really, *every effort*?? Have you loved your spouse without any expectation of that love being returned, and have you just given because that’s what you vowed you would do? *No*? I didn’t think so. So do it. And pray. Pray for the help to find the words and the strength. [52]

I would really want to say to anyone considering divorce: It is worth the effort to try and save your marriage—not just for your children (although it will probably be the greatest gift you could give them), but also for yourself. God is really good; give Him a chance to heal your marriage. I don’t know what I would say to the children. Is there anything you can really say? [50]

To parents considering divorce: It does affect children. They may not tell you because they don't want to hurt your feelings, but there are no children who want their parents to be apart. Just ask them. [11]

To the parents: Follow the tools that our faith gives us in simple prayers, such as forgiving others' trespasses as we beg forgiveness of those whom we've trespassed against. Never put your own trials and tribulations on a pedestal, making them special or distinct or prioritized above the standard to which you hold others. Making separate rules for yourself is where the negotiating begins. Remember that suffering is meaningful, but be honest with yourself if you are turning away from all of the resources available to help you in difficult times. Acknowledge that you aren't making good decisions, and that those bad decisions will have dire consequences.

Understand that, if you choose to divorce, you aren't making the decision for the betterment of your children. You are trying to find a release valve for your tensions or struggles, and you are entertaining permanent familial dysfunction as an acceptable solution. That's like lighting a match at a gas station and throwing it out the window as you drive away from the impending explosion and damage you just created. Divorce won't relieve your tension or struggle, and you won't be free of your spouse in this life. Your children will suffer for the rest of their lives at every moment that should be joyful: Graduations, sacraments, engagements, marriages, having children of their own, Christmases, birthdays, holidays. Your marital dysfunction will become their internal dialogue, and the only legacy that you will leave them is the sum total of all the negativity that you fostered in marriage and whatever subjective reasoning you used to abandon yours. You will teach them how to divorce by modeling it for them. You will confuse them and make them feel abandoned in the process.

You cannot teach the importance of faith, good decision-making, and trust in God when applying those things inconsistently in your own life. Your excuses will be the seed of your children's future failures and dysfunction, and your unwillingness to fight for your own



marriage will be the guiding star to the future failure of their marriages. All the positive things that you modeled for your children will be eclipsed by the disordered things you modeled when divorce is the punchline. And when they say “I do” as adults themselves, you will have taught them that that vow isn’t sacred, isn’t worth protecting, and that it’s not terribly special. You will have taught them that they can give up and walk away if they change their mind later. [69]

To the parents I would say, try to work it out so that your children will be happier and more productive in their lives. Don’t be selfish; think about the long-lasting consequences to your children. For the children, I would just try to be there for them; I really don’t know what to say.... [62]

To people considering divorce: Be careful. There are a lot of falsehoods about marriage and divorce that are pushed by the culture. Good marriages aren't lovey-dovey all of the time, and even difficult marriages aren't pure, nonstop suffering from dawn to dusk, 24/7. If you can live with the differences between you and your spouse, if there is no substance abuse or danger, then just don't do it—don't divorce. The bad moments will pass; they always do. I have been separated from my husband before, and we're together now. It's not a “better life.” I've suffered separated, and I've suffered married. The difference is, when I was separated the suffering was distributed among all involved. It was acute and brutal. While married, the suffering is mine alone, comes and goes in waves, and gets less intense and less frequent as the years go by. Our culture has a really toxic idea of what love is, but love is not a fuzzy feeling—it's a choice. And it's a hard choice sometimes.

For kids dealing with divorce: It's okay to be mad about it. An injustice was committed against you. Your parents had the responsibility to protect you, and they failed. They owe you an apology. [4]

*To those of you who are getting divorced...* Sorry, but you stood up there, professed a vow, and created children...there was love there...now you don't love? I just don't get it. **Do not divorce.** Do not do it. What more can I say? Children need their dad...not a stepdad...and their mom...not a stepmom...They need their dad and mom in the same house, praying together and loving the children they created. It affects children to the core. How can it not?! When the dad leaves, it is abandonment of the wife *and the children*. It is an abandonment issue.

What to say to children?! I really have no clue! This is hell. Your family is forever broken. How, as a child, do you deal with that? **A child should never have to deal with that.** I just have no words. [31]

I'd say to parents out there, "Wait! Have you tried everything?" If there is a history of addiction, consider that the 12 steps are life-saving. Although it didn't work out for my parents, I watched how Al-Anon transformed my mother; the principles are right in line with the Church's teachings. Get your hands on helpful books that have worked for others. If it still doesn't work out, you can honestly say, and tell your children, that you tried everything.

To the children, I'd say stay close to God. Surround yourself with friends and family who know the truth and are not afraid to tell you what that is. Know that the divorce is not your fault in any way. Try to understand where your parents have been and where they are. Pray for them. Ignore the statistics. Ignore the devil when he tries to use the situation to convince you of lies that may include half-truths. Take ten minutes a day to read the Bible. If you take the time to know the truth about yourself and about God, you'll be less likely to believe the lies that the evil one will try to set up early on. [20]

I'd like to point out something I've observed: I have rarely seen divorcing couples mature or learn from their mistakes. What I have seen is a confirmation in selfishness, a regression in maturity, and a tendency to seek out fewer and fewer mature individuals. I saw this

with my own parents, and I have seen it for the last 30 years. Divorce is bad for the kids, and it is really bad for the divorcing couples.

Also, is not so obvious to those embarking on divorce that the government (in the form of the judiciary) becomes intimately and inappropriately involved in the affairs of the (broken) home. Decisions that should be worked out between spouses and the children are suddenly dictated by the state, and it is not a pretty thing, especially if it has been contested.

On the other hand, I have seen couples come through crises without divorcing, who are now experiencing the richness and depth of all the marital imagery with which our Scriptures are woven. I am just beginning to experience that myself.

As for the children: I have told such children that they may consider my home a refuge. I would beg parents not to do it, and I have done so. [58]

Ten years ago, someone made the mistake of asking me this question in a very public place: "What would you say to children whose parents are divorcing?" Between sobs, this is what I told that man to tell those kids: "It's not your fault."

If you hate your children, by all means, get a divorce. I cannot imagine any frustration would cause me to disregard this truth I know. Work it out! [51]

I have had to face this question. It is hard for me because I cannot promise the children healing. I'd just say, if you can, tell your parents the truth—that it hurts and that they need to work it out. Tell them that they can't go on to any new relationships until you're grown. [26]

I would tell these children that, even though they are children, they have a voice and should say, loud and clear, what they are feeling. I would tell them that they can be honest and tell their parents they don't want them to get divorced. They should tell another adult or their priest, asking them to come and help their parents. Children are a part

of the family, too, and I think too often the children feel silenced and that they have no voice. Children are scared to say anything, because they've already seen what happens when someone stops loving another person—they push them away and out of their lives. I wonder if these children fear that the same thing will happen to them? [49]

As a Director of Religious Education (DRE), I have always tried to clearly communicate that the parents' problems and issues are not caused by the child.

Married couples should exhaust every opportunity for counseling and help to make their marriage work. The reality is that most marital problems *can* be corrected. Forgiveness can be offered. And people need to commit to change. Looking back, and with the experience I have gained as a husband, father, and DRE, I can see how my own parents' marriage could have been saved...The short answer is conversion. So, I pray for that for them. I also see that the same answer would have saved my wife's first marriage...I am, selfishly, grateful that that conversion came later for my wife... [3]

To the kids: It's not your fault. And there are many, many people in the world now who understand what you're going through.

To the parents: Please, just don't. Do everything you can to work things out, because your kids will never be the same inside. [25]

To the children: Your feelings are valid, regardless of the propaganda your parents tell you. You are capable of healing, because God will walk with you. Try to forgive your parents, even if it means that every day you have to forgive, over and over. Be bold and express your feelings with your parents—they need to know how you feel! Demand their time and attention, even if it's inconvenient for them to give it! You are not deserving of neglect as a result of their choices! [44]

I would hug the children. I would try to show them to trust in God. I would tell them that God still loves them, even if they feel the rejection of their parents' love. I want them to know that it will be painful, but they will get through it.

I would ask the parents to try to think of their children as much as possible. Make sure there is no other way possible for reconciling their differences. Their children will inevitably feel like it is their fault, that their parents don't love them enough, that their parents would prefer to have a break from them. [19]

To the children, I would say to pray for your parents and the healing of their marriage. Know that this is not your fault. Talk out any struggles or thoughts with trusted friends, because hiding your emotions and feelings isn't healthy, and it's what the devil wants. Stay close to Christ and His Church, which is full of love and is unchanging.

I would tell parents to read this book.

A final thought: Thinking through these questions has been nice. I noticed that when typing out most of my responses, I felt angry. I think the anger is directed more at hypothetical parents who are considering divorce than at my parents. There will always be a part of me that wonders why the divorce happened, but I love my parents and will always give them my best, even if I didn't receive theirs in this particular case. I have a pretty good relationship with my parents, but it's more of a shallow relationship rather than one where we can talk about deep things. I wish that was different. [48]

I would tell those children to find someone to talk to. Find someone they feel safe enough to grieve with and then do so. I would tell them not to hold their feelings inside, because the feelings could build to an unbearable level, like they did for me.

As for the parents, I would beg them to reconsider. I would beg them to keep trying therapy. I would tell them what I dealt with and what I continue to deal with, in the hopes that it would deter them from potentially causing the same thing in their children. [22]

To the kids: I'm sorry. It's okay to be sad or confused. It's okay to change your mind about how you feel. I would like to explain redemptive suffering<sup>4</sup> and let them know that it's okay to suffer and to acknowledge that suffering. I would like to remind these kids that they are not their parents. With the Catholic faith, good role models, and God's grace, they don't have to follow the same path as their parents.

To the parents: If possible, don't get a divorce. It will change your children's lives forever, and they will feel that change even more than you will. The kids don't get to move on and start over. They have to navigate and straddle the now-separate worlds of their parents for the rest of their lives. Divorce likely isn't the solution to the family's problems. [16]

Perspective is so necessary. Parents: Dare to look at all the outcomes as a result of your decision. If you are a person of faith, understand the eternal damage being done, and understand the truth of sacrifice—that love is sacrifice. Understand and admit that you are willfully damaging your children and choosing a path that will not bless the next generation but curse it. Understand that you are willfully and openly robbing your children of their best potential, and are instead creating for them a weak foundation without trust or security to build them up strong and sure. [47]

To the children: Talk to your parents. Tell them how you feel. Tell them how much your family means to you and beg them to try harder.

To the parents considering divorce: Don't do it. You made a vow. You owe it to your family to make *every* effort to try to make it work. I don't think people *really* try nowadays; they just put themselves first and go with what feels good at the moment. It should not be about "right now." It should be about forever. It should be about family. It should be about love. What does a marriage vow even mean if you aren't even willing to fight for it? [59]

What I would say to a child facing his parents' divorce: God is there for you, even in your darkest moments. Trust Him. If you focus on Him, there will come a time when you can see what beauty He can bring out of the greatest pain you endure. And you are not alone in going through a difficult situation; many others have been through similar difficulties. These difficulties can prepare you for a future and make you stronger. I would tell the children inspirational stories of people who have emerged from divorce and its difficulties to lead fulfilling and happy lives, such as Mother Angelica. When I was young and was told similar stories, it gave me hope.

What I would say to parents considering divorce: Try to think about what you saw in each other to begin with, what brought you together. Give the other partner space, if they need it; accept the differences the other has, and maybe you can live together peacefully, even if not in unity. Try to keep your disagreements private from your children. It is totally unfair to put them in the middle and make them feel that they must take sides. A child has the right to love both parents, regardless of how the parents feel about each other. If a divorce does occur, be fair about visitation. You don't have to be the favorite parent. Your child can love each of you for the unique value you offer. And remember that when one parent puts down the other, it is also a put-down of the child, since half of that child is from that other parent! [45]

To the children, I would urge them to turn to God, to trust Him; He can and will redeem their lives. *If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.* (Ps. 27:10).

To parents—don't do it! God hates divorce, and for good reason. Marriage can be very hard, but if you stick with it, God will bring good out of it. [21]

To the children: It doesn't have to be this way for you, for your future. Live your life to be the person *you* want to be. Do not fear, and I'm sorry you have to deal with this.

To the parents: It doesn't have to be this way. Make the change necessary to honor your vows. Be a person of honor and of fortitude. Do not fear things that are hard. The grace needed to overcome your challenge is available to you. Have the courage to be humble enough to ask for that grace. And if there's something you think you're not getting out of life, be sure that you are giving it first; i.e., if you want love, you'd better be giving love. A less emotion-driven, more objective outlook that has been placed before me (and helped me a lot) is this: In a marriage, it doesn't matter what you "get" from your partner. Give of yourself anyway. You have made a promise; now keep it. [56]

I would say to the kids: It's *okay* to hate that your parents are getting divorced. It's okay to need help to cope. It's okay to see that divorce is *bad* and to still love your parents, even though you recognize what they did was wrong. Your parents aren't *bad* people; they just decided to do a bad thing. It's okay to love them still! And, ugh, I just want to hug them and cry with them because I know that pain!

I would say to the parents: Stop being selfish! Consider that you *are* being selfish and that you've *been* selfish, which is what brought you to this point. Gain some humility and compassion and *work* on your marriage! Learn to compromise and sacrifice. Self-knowledge is *so* important; don't just point the finger at your spouse. Pray for self-knowledge, see what faults *you* are bringing to the table in your marriage, and work on changing that.

For parents who think their children will be happy when they are happy: I went to a counselor as a kid. I don't remember it helping much, but I remember counselors telling my mom that her kids "needed to see her happy." They advised that she should do basically whatever she wanted, because that would make her happy and fulfilled, and that's what mattered most to us kids—not the marriage itself, but for kids to see their parents "happy and fulfilled."

NO, NO, NO!! That is *not* developmentally appropriate for children! They don't care one iota how "happy" their parents are! And



they *shouldn't* have to! They are children! The *parents* are the ones who should be looking out for the emotional and psychological wellbeing of their children, not the other way around. That counselor's advice was just a justification for my mother to do whatever she pleased, without guilt. It was terrible advice. No, your children do not care about seeing you "fulfilled." They don't even understand that concept. They want you to step up and act like a parent, to problem-solve like an adult, to learn to be humble and sacrificial, and to keep the vows you made on your wedding day. [57]

Again, I come back to the Church's teaching on marriage. It would be difficult for me to charitably counsel anyone considering divorce, really, as I find these people to be selfish and petty. That's how I began to feel about my mom, anyway. [33]

My dear little brother or sister, what is happening between your parents is not your fault. It will be hard, but never, ever think for a moment that it is because of you or something you did.

Parents, fight for your marriage. Put aside your pride and your anger toward one another, and do the hard work you need to do, in order to deal with whatever is causing your hearts to separate from one another. Go to counseling, go to therapy. Sleep in separate beds or rooms if you must. Whatever you do, for the sake of your souls and for the good of your children, do not give the devil his victory over your marriage by divorcing one another. It seems like that would be the answer to everything, but you may as well toss the hearts of your children into a blender in which you, Mom and Dad, are the blades. I know you don't intend to hurt your children, but *they are the fruit of your union*; what tears your marriage apart will therefore tear them apart. [24]

To the parents I would just ask you, *implore you*, to try again. Try for each other, for God, for your amazing children. Each and every one of them deserves your complete attention.

To the children I would say that Jesus is here for you. In every pain, in every tear, cry out to Jesus. And always to ask our Mother Mary to come to your aid; she will always be there when you call on her. [68]

Parents who are ready to divorce each other need intense Catholic counseling. I am guessing 99% won't receive it. They need to place their spouse before themselves, even if they are deathly unhappy, but they won't.

I would tell the children to be 100% brutally honest about their feelings, without guilt. Most won't, because they feel guilty and are afraid of losing their parents completely. By this time, it is really too late. Most parishes fail with Pre-Cana, minimize the Real Presence, don't teach the rosary or other important prayers and devotions, don't prioritize confession or Mass more than once a week, don't educate on sin, and never mention contraception. They teach nothing on chastity. They are too collegial, too enabling, and are in a poor position to help broken families. [70]

To parents: Marriage means something—to you, to your children, to your community. It's not meant to be easy, or for you to just break it off when things get difficult or you don't "feel" anything anymore. For all of those who are thinking about it, take yourself out of it—your hurt, your pain, your lack of "romantic feelings." Look at your children. How are you going to balance their need to please both of you once you are no longer under the same roof? How are you going to explain to them the importance of fighting for love or family? How are you going to prevent them from feeling as if they do not truly belong? How will you manage their fear that it was something *they* did to cause you to separate? How can you guarantee that this one decision will not have a lasting impact in ways that you will never truly know for the rest of your child's life? If you really, truly took the time to answer these questions, then maybe, just maybe, thinking about what you can

do to stay together (and maybe even flourish!) will not seem as daunting or difficult or worthless.

This is not for the children facing their parents' divorce right now, but for all those adult children of divorce who are still struggling to forgive...I get it. I am sorry this is still a struggle, but we are all adults. At some point, we all have to take responsibility for our own lives and how we react. Yes, it's hard. Yes, you can still hate the fact that your parents are divorced, but the reality is...they are. And you are now an adult navigating this world. Reach out to others who are in your boat. Talk to a therapist! You want to be free from this...you deserve to be free from this. You are bigger than your parents' divorce and all the struggles that have come from it. It's not easy, nor is it fun, but it is worth it to be free of feeling bound by hatred, sadness, and anger. Your heart must heal. [9]

My parents divorced late in life, and having elderly parents divorce is becoming more commonplace, unfortunately. I would say to adults experiencing their parents' divorce: Be sure you aren't making any of the same mistakes. Learn from their failures. You're led to believe that, because you're an adult while this divorce is occurring, it won't affect you—that it's just between your mom and dad. You have your own life, after all. This is what they may tell you and what you will even tell yourself—you have no "right" to be upset or devastated; only little children get to be emotionally destroyed by this break-up in the family.

But in reality, it feels like a sickness in the family tree. The foundation you have taken for granted has been sick longer than you realized, and you may fear for your own roots. It's okay to feel bad and to try to help your parents understand, if they are willing to listen, what you are going through. Your fears are real, but if your faith and your marriage and your family mean the world to you, then your foundation is already solid and you will be fine. [38]

I would advise parents considering divorce not to do it. We have to start by instilling a proper understanding of marriage. Divorce is a

possible consideration only when one has an incorrect notion of marriage, which is pervasive in our secular culture.

I don't know what I would say to a child whose parents may be getting a divorce. I know words like "you'll get through this" would have been small comfort to me as a kid. Perhaps I'd emphasize that it is not the child's fault, although that wouldn't have brought me much comfort, either. [12]

I don't know what to say to children who are facing divorce, other than to look to things eternal.

I would say to parents who are considering divorce: Have courage and make sacrifices for your children, for your family, for their future. Family is everything. Be a friend to your spouse and give it time. My mom has an uncle who was a philanderer and who was eventually diagnosed with HIV. His wife forgave him and took care of him until he died. There are people out there living lives of selflessness and heroic virtue. The world needs more people like that. Don't be fooled by empty promises of fulfillment and chasing your dreams at the expense of others, or eventually you will find yourself estranged, alone, and full of regret. Even if you act out of self-interest, be pragmatic and stay the course. [53]

To children: We can live holy, sacramental, and loving marriages, regardless of the negative examples we have seen.

To parents: As challenging as it can be, you made a commitment before God and your families/friends. Remember your vows.<sup>5</sup> Remember the questions<sup>6</sup> you were asked prior to saying your vows and how powerful those words were. Words carry weight. We cannot say these words under oath and then have them mean nothing. Our best friends challenged some friends of theirs who wanted to divorce, by saying, "We were witnesses to your vows, and we are not going to let you throw that away." Praise God, that marriage is stronger and continues today. More people should challenge others not to divorce

and to make the sacrifices required to make it work. I have seen God work *miracles* in some couples. With Him, all things are possible. [30]

To parents considering divorce: Why do children have to adjust everything about their lives just because you two can't get along? Why don't you adjust your lives instead, so that the children stay put in the same home, and one parent at a time lives in the children's home? Let the parents move back and forth between two homes, not the kids.

To children: I don't even know what to say. It makes me so sad when parents divorce while children are still living at home. It makes me just as sad, but in a different way, when parents with adult children divorce—because the feelings of adult children of divorce are disregarded even more than the feelings of minor children. [7]

Parents considering divorce: Get your relationship right with God first. Attend a marriage retreat and fight for your marriage. [34]

I'd want to hand children a book like Judith Wallerstein's *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* for them to read when they get a bit older so they can understand some of the challenges they face. When I was younger, I sensed something was wrong with me, but did not really know what it was since there was little to no acknowledgment—at church or in society at large—that divorce is any kind of an issue at all for children.

Even more so, I'd want to hand the aforementioned book to parents contemplating divorce, with the hope that they would reconsider, even if it's for their children's sake. I'd also want to say to the parents that divorce will have a direct and profound impact on their children for the rest of their lives.

I believe divorce not only affects the relationship between children and their parents, but also can affect sibling relationships. I know that in our home (we ended up living with my mother), the divorce destroyed much of the sense of our being an actual family. Rather, it

was like we were just four people who happened to be living under the same roof.

Other than that, I'd want the children *and* the parents to have a genuine and sincere conversion to Catholicism. I think that for children of divorce, the Church can give them something stable in their lives and help direct them, particularly in the absence of a father in their lives. [32]

I would like to tell children that the divorce is not their fault, and that both their parents love them very much and don't want to hurt them. I would tell them that their mom and dad are not doing a great job at being grown-ups, and it will make their lives harder than other kids' lives, but that God will give them the strength to carry on. I would tell them to stay close to their siblings and to the Church, and to use the wisdom of the Church to show them the right way to live so they can do better than their parents.

To parents considering divorce, I would recommend that they at least try things like Retrouvaille<sup>7</sup> or Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME)<sup>8</sup> and perhaps get some counseling or read some of the excellent books about love, marriage, and relationships. I have read many of them myself, and they have helped. My husband and I have gone to the WWME weekend, and we also participate in a local share group that reinforces the WWME dialogue process. Couples must allow themselves to be vulnerable, bare the deepest parts of their souls, and try to rediscover what brought them together in the first place. Hopefully, they will honor their vows and see how important it is to the children to keep the family together. [54]

To children facing their parents' divorce today...oh gosh...I would just want to put them in touch with resources to help them navigate it, and I would want to give them permission to navigate it with all the highs and lows. I would tell them that it's okay to be sad about it, and it's okay to wish things were different. The divorce doesn't mean their

lives will be terrible or that they can't go on to experience great happiness!

To couples considering divorce: Consider that a bad marriage can become a good marriage with time. Consider the long-term consequences of divorce on your kids. What might look like freedom or an easier life now isn't necessarily the case. Happiness after divorce is an elusive thing. If you aren't in danger, please reconsider. [40]

To the children: If your parents are divorcing, please stay strong. It is in no way your fault. Your parents love you, and they are not divorcing you, even if it feels that way. Try to always be honest with your parents, even if they get upset. Pray for your parents. Please know that love is a decision, not a feeling. If you know that, and if you allow God to be the head of your marriage when you do get married, you will not end up divorced.

To the parents considering divorce: I urge you to remember your vows, I urge you to think of your children, and I urge you take time to work on your marriage before you take the "easy way out." Go to a marriage retreat. Research! Go see a marriage counselor. Talk to a priest. There is nothing God cannot fix! Love is a decision not a feeling! [6]

To children, I would say this: Trust God. Learn to truly be present to Him. Adults make mistakes, but God never does. He will be with you even when you are agonizing at the foot of the cross. Stay with Him. Your parents really, truly do love you. They are really mixed up right now, but you don't have to be. You do not have to be a victim in this. This is *not* your fault. This is *not* God's fault. Hang in there....Truly, each day, somehow, it will get better.

To adults considering divorce, I would say: Do whatever it takes to stay together. Ask God for humility, strength, grace, or whatever it takes to see your spouse as a son/daughter of God. If this does not have to do with you or the children's safety, *do whatever it takes to work it*

*out!!* Really. What you are about to do by choosing divorce—you have no idea the impact it will have on your children.

If you do divorce: *Do not take it out on the kids!!* Do not badmouth your spouse. *Be a grown-up!!* Do *not* lean on your kids for emotional support! Get help from a reputable (preferably Catholic or Christian) counselor if you need to talk, but do not hash it out with your kids! Love your children, because they will be devastated! Help them! Hang in there, trust in God, and never leave His side; somehow it will get better.

I thought of something else that I think it is important to include. I'm quite sure this might not go over well with divorced readers, but it is the truth and it's important. This will sound harsh for those looking to "move on" to the next guy or gal, but if you have children, you really shouldn't be "dating" after you get divorced. I cannot tell you how absolutely unsettling and weird it was for me to see my mom with other guys. It was *so* uncomfortable. Even as a kid, I knew something was not right. Plus, I would lie awake at night waiting for her to come home from a date, thinking she would die in an accident. It really was awful.

So, here's the deal for divorced parents: I'm sorry it didn't work out, I'm sorry things are a mess, but guess what...you have children and at this point, they are the *most* important thing in your life (besides God). Do not date. Do not be selfish and worry about your "love life." Suck it up, be a grownup, and put your kids first. [41]

To the parents: What have you willingly and joyfully sacrificed for your family? For your spouse? [61]

Well, I told my own children when my husband and I divorced that this wasn't their fault, that their father and I loved them very much, and that we would do our best to make this easy for them. I just told them every day, as much as they needed to hear it, that I loved them and that I would always be there; I wasn't leaving.



As for parents contemplating divorce: Short of abuse, I would suggest the parents find a way to work through their problems. Divorce is horrible on everyone involved. It is rare for people who are divorced to actually become happier than they were before. I would suggest that anyone who is thinking about divorce talk to someone who's actually been divorced. Ask that person what it was like, how the kids actually handled the divorce, and how their life is now. I'd hope that the honest answers might dissuade people from throwing away a marriage. [17]

I don't know how to answer this one. Sorry...I feel like I should have a lot to say here. I just don't know. I don't know what I would have wanted someone to say to me. "It's not your fault" sounds so empty. People said it to me, and I'm like, "Yeah, yeah I know." But I guess I don't know...? [29]

To the parents: The grass may appear greener; it usually isn't. I read somewhere that people are discontented with 20% of the things their spouse does or doesn't do—80% is all right, but that 20% just drives them crazy. So they trade up, only to find that, while the new spouse excels at that 20% and fills those needs quite nicely, they also have things about them that irritate, aren't perfect, and don't make the spouse "happy." Don't trade the 80 for the 20. [46]

To children enduring a divorce, I simply pray for them. I don't want to promise them it will be okay, because it might be very difficult for the rest of their lives; however, they *can* find hope and healing in Christ, in the Church, and in their own marriages. They can take heart, because Christ makes all things new. Their marriages do *not* have to be a repeat of their parents' mistakes. Much of my healing has been in the beauty and stability of my own marriage. We have been very intentional about instilling a sense of faith and family traditions with our children, and we aim to create a very stable family environment so that the girls know that family is first. [65]

To children of divorce today: I once heard Dr. Laura Schlessinger say this, and I love it: "You have two chances to have a family—once as a child, where you have no control over it, and once as an adult, where you are making the decisions as to how it will be." Well, no matter your level of pain and trauma, it is in *your* hands to create the family life you have always dreamed of having for yourself. Give your children what you didn't have, because you *know* what the other side is like, and you don't want to put any other child through that. Start making the sacrificial decisions, and make it happen. [1]

To the children: It is not your fault. You are allowed to grieve. It is not okay that they are divorcing, and I'm so, so sorry. Jesus and Momma Mary are with you.

To the adults: Please reconsider. Your children need to see how to work through conflicts. They need to be taught that you don't just throw away your family when things are tough. They need to know that vows mean something, that they're a promise to God. They need stability, love, and *both* of their parents in their home. [66]

If you are married, become the most virtuous person you can. Gain counsel when things are difficult. Do the right thing, not the easiest thing. Seek forgiveness and give it freely, even when there has been a real breach in a relationship. Heal relationships. Get counseling yourself if you are the adult child of divorce and it is affecting you. Communicate with your children about your love for them. When things cannot be repaired and a separation must occur, I believe it can be done in a healing way. If there is one parent who can explain to the children what is happening, continue offering love and support, and build the children in their understanding of dating, marriage, spouse selection, etc., the children can then come out with an intact view of how to proceed in their own lives. They will have the knowledge of the standard and the knowledge that their parents (or at least one of them) did not live up to it. But the standard is still there.

To the children: Seek out good models of marriage. If you get marriage and family right, you win more than if you'd won the lottery. If you get it wrong, it could be a mistake with a long shadow. No matter what happens, seek the Lord and depend on Him. [15]

To the parents: Have you truly worked together through your issues before taking the cop-out of a divorce? [10]

I have no advice or words of comfort for kids going through divorce. I have made it my commitment to speak with love and honesty to my friends and family who are considering divorce (absent danger), letting them know that I disagree with that solution. I warn them that divorce is a decision that will affect at least two generations, and that no matter how well they plan it or how amicable they intend on being, their kids will pay a price. I offer to be of help, and I offer books that I feel have helped me; however, my commitment is to never, ever be a voice of endorsement. I do this as my way to speak for the kids, with the hope that maybe, just maybe, they won't have to pick up their parents' cross. [28]

To any children facing their parents' divorce: Turn to Jesus and strengthen your relationship with Him. That is a relationship that you'll never have to worry about coming apart. He will be there for you whenever you need Him, and He will be a comfort in the middle of the storm. [35]

I would like to tell them that, no matter what is said or done, it is not their fault that their parents are getting divorced. Every child of divorce hears this, but I don't think any of them truly believes it at first. How can they? So much of what pushes a man and wife to divorce happens behind the scenes, so all a child has to go on is what he witnesses personally. Therefore, every instance when he acted out and made his parents angry or upset comes back to haunt him. A child is slowly taught to take responsibility for his own actions and their

consequences, and then a divorce happens. It is the biggest thing that can happen outside of a death in the family, and suddenly everyone who was responsible for holding him accountable is saying that he had nothing to do with it. To a child's mind, it doesn't add up. Hearing that it is not his fault from someone who has gone through the same thing would carry more weight, because I and others like me could help him understand that he didn't witness his parents' personal life—the part kept secret from him. [5]

To the children: Pray for your parents. Talk to them and tell them how you feel. Most of all, understand not to blame yourself for what they are going through. They are adults and have their own issues. They both love you very much.

To the parents: Remember your vows. Whatever it is you are going through that is causing the division between you, get help first before considering divorce. Do not give up so easily, as that is exactly what the devil wants you to do. Remember that you loved each other at one time. Try to go back to that and renew your strength. [36]

This is so hard for me, because I remember praying to God to help my mom and dad. It was not to be as I prayed, and I think that is the day I lost faith. Today, I would encourage a child to pray, to read about Jesus and the saints. However, I also understand what is happening to a child, and it is so hard for a child when parents are not living a faith-filled life. This is so destructive. I'm not sure what you can do for a child other than pray for him and be there for him when you can. I wish my father and mother could have separated while he went through some treatment, but they did not do that sort of thing then...maybe today that is possible. Again though, when it is a child, there is not much you can say—just pray for them and with them, and be kind to them. Listen and share the love of God with them.

I know several couples who have divorced since I met them—all practicing Catholics. I'm not sure there is anything they were willing to do to make their marriage work in the end...and, really, that is what

this comes down to—people wanting their relationship to work and working hard at it. [64]

For the children: I am sorry. You are loved by a perfect Father and a wonderful Mother. God and Mary are the only truly perfect parents. You can choose to be more like them or more like your own parents. You are *loved* and can do things differently. This is not your problem.

Depending on the age and maturity of the children, I'd try to ask them questions more than tell them what to do. For example, How will this make you stronger? What mistakes did your parents make? How can you see yourself repeating mistakes? What can you do so that you don't repeat mistakes? What are you learning from your current relationship? How is it preparing you for x, y, z...?

For the parents: Do *not* do it. *Choose* to love. This is temporary. Research and find a better way. Don't discuss your problems all the time. Discuss your similarities—there are plenty of them for all of us. Don't assume there is no way around a problem. There always is. [14]

To the children I would say this: People are going to let you down. They are going to be selfish, even the people you rely on the most. Please know that your parents' choices are not, and could never be, your fault. You deserve to be put first. You deserve better. Jesus gives you better, always, and He will never leave you nor forsake you. Trust in Him. And forgive your parents.

To the parents considering divorce I would say this: Take it from one who has been in both places. I understand where you are in your marriage. I have been there. There is incredible joy and rebirth in going through life's hardships with your spouse and coming out the other side—together. There will be a deeper love and a greater strength in your relationship than you could ever imagine. Living God's will for your life is the greatest gift you could be given. Please don't wait as long as I did to learn this. Begin now.

I've also been the child of divorce and—make no mistake about it—no matter how amicable your divorce, your children will be devastated,

and they will never be the same again. Their foundation will be pulled out from under them, and nothing will ever replace it. Anything else is a poor substitute for their intact family. [43]

I would tell the children to stay close to God and don't be afraid to talk about how you feel. I would tell the parents that the grass isn't greener on the other side... if they run, they will just find more problems. [60]

I would want to encourage those children not to stuff down or keep their feelings inside themselves. I would tell them that it is healthy to try to tell their parents how they feel and what they hope for. Their voices count and need to be heard in the family.

I would tell the parents that the effects of divorce are long-term and often not evident until later in life when children are older—and that most children of divorce will have problems developing and maintaining healthy relationships. I would encourage them to get their children into Christian (Catholic) counseling right away, while they (the parents) are working out the problems in their marriage. I would also remind them to tell their children repeatedly that the children are completely blameless and did nothing to cause their parents to fight and separate. I would tell the parents to please reconsider, to make a commitment to fight for their marriage, to go before the Blessed Sacrament, to go to confession frequently, and to find a good Catholic marriage counselor. They should stay in counseling for a significant period of time before they make any major decisions. [63]

I would tell parents facing the prospect of divorce that their children will never be the same and that it will wreak havoc in their lives. Their marriage is a covenant, like the one Jesus has with His Church. How easy would they like it to be for Jesus to leave them?

I don't know what I would tell the kids, though. [39]

To the children: I am so sorry. It is *not* your fault, and nothing you can do will make it better for your parents. You aren't responsible for their happiness or unhappiness. You and your siblings are the best things that ever happened to your parents.

To those considering divorce: I know it's hard, and I know it seems impossible. Step back from your immediate unhappiness and take a long view. Really talk to people who have been married a long time and learn that it is hard for everyone, not just you. Your situation isn't as uniquely difficult as you think it is. Love ebbs and flows. Don't quit just because the tide is low; it will come back. [67]

To kids: I'm sorry. I don't know what you're going through, because every experience is different. Talk to someone. It doesn't have to be your parents. Find an adult you trust—a counselor, minister, or priest. Don't bottle up your feelings in order to appear strong for your parents, siblings, friends, teachers, or whomever. It doesn't do anyone any favors.

To adults: I pray to God that you have really thought this through. I won't assume to know why you're considering divorce, but it is as huge a commitment as getting married. Back then, you chose to love one another. Love is a choice, not a feeling. Oftentimes it is a hard choice. I have regrets in my life, but I don't regret the times when I chose to love and was hurt as much as if I had chosen *not* to love in fear of getting hurt. [37]

To the children I say: Pray for your parents. Write out your prayers and give them to your parents, or read them aloud to your parents so they know that you desire that they fulfill their vows to each other. It's okay to share your feelings with them...if they say everything will be okay, it's okay to disagree (respectfully, of course).

To the parents I say: Don't do it. Stick to your vows, pray your vows, and ask your community to help you keep your marriage together. If anyone or everyone says "just leave," tell them they are

wrong, and ask for their prayerful support in saving your marriage. Don't be selfish, because the decision has many ripples. [55]

I would ask parents to reconsider—it sounds so simple, doesn't it? I know it isn't, but people have to be willing to excavate their fear and pain in prayer. It can be done. [8]

To my own children, I want to say I'm sorry. I "nag" you about "morality" because I want you to be happy. I "nag" you about having a relationship with God and coming back to the Church because I do love you. I do want what is good, true, and beautiful for you and for me. I want the "sins of the father"—the terrible legacy of terrible marriages—to be broken with you, for you, and for your children.

I want to say to those kids of divorced parents, find another way. Cultivate your relationship with Jesus because He will never hurt you or leave you. Pray for your parents. Ask for the gift of faith.

No matter how crappy my own marriage might be at the time, whenever a parent, employee, friend, or stranger tells me about an impending divorce, I tell them that the kids are worth it to try to stay together; think of the kids. I told this to one young girl at work, and I prayed for her. I see her now with her family and her second child—I see the family legacy they are creating, and I hear the praise she gives her spouse—and I am thankful that God makes a way.

Thanks for letting me participate in this book. This has been...emotional. And good. [23]



## Chapter Nine

# Contributors

*[Contributor ID Number] Sex, age, marital and family status. Age at time of parents' separation/divorce (hereafter "divorce," for simplicity's sake). Parents' marital history/status.*

[1] Female, 40, married with seven children. Age 13 at time of parents' divorce. Dad (now deceased) remarried once; mom remarried twice.

[2] Female, 28, married. Age 14 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried once; mom has boyfriend of 17 years.

[3] Male, 46, married 23 years with five children (three from wife's first marriage). Age 20 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried twice; mom never remarried, but has had relationships.

[4] Female, 38, married with two children. Age 12 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom now in common law marriage.

[5] Male, 34, married, no children. Age 12 at time of parents' divorce. Both parents remarried.

[6] Female, 39, married with 12 children. Age six at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried twice and had several live-in girlfriends; mom remarried twice.

[7] Female, 48, married with six children. Age 31 at time of parents' separation. Permanent separation without legal divorce, no remarriages.

[8] Female, 49, married with four children. Age 13 at time of parents' divorce. Dad probably remarried (cannot confirm; contact cut many years ago); mom did not remarry.

[9] Female, 31, single. Age seven at time of parents' divorce. Neither parent remarried, but both cohabiting with "significant other."

[10] Female, 41, married with one child. Age 21 at time of parents' divorce. Dad is deceased; mom remarried.

[11] Female, 46, divorced and remarried, one child from first marriage. Age 16 at time of parents' divorce. Both parents had been married previously. No further remarriages.

[12] Male, 39, married with three children. Age 23 at time of parents' divorce. Both parents had been married previously. Dad has "significant other"; mom currently divorcing third husband.

[13] Female, 34, married with four children. Age 20 at time of parents' divorce. Neither parent remarried.

[14] Female, 46, divorced with five children. Age 24 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried, mom did not remarry.

[15] Female, 51, married with six children (two from husband's first marriage). Age eight at time of parents' divorce. Dad (now deceased) remarried twice; mom remarried twice.

[16] Female, 35, married with five children. Age two at time of parents' divorce. Both parents remarried.

[17] Female, 37, divorced with two children. Age 15 at time of parents' divorce. Dad (now deceased) was married previously, had three marriages total; mom remarried.

[18] Female, 59, divorced with three children. Age nine at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried twice; mom remarried once.

[19] Female, 25, married with one child. Age three at time of parents' divorce. No contact with dad since divorce; mom never remarried.

[20] Female, 49, married (second marriage) with eight children (one out-of-wedlock, one from previous marriage, six from current marriage). Age 15 at time of parents' divorce. Both parents remarried (dad now deceased).

[21] Female, 48, married with two children. Age seven at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom deceased (suicide).

[22] Female, 22, single. Age 16 at time of parents' divorce.

[23] Female, 43, married (second marriage) with four children (two from each marriage). Age 24 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom deceased.

[24] Male, 33, vowed religious (soon to be ordained a priest). Age 19 at time of parents' separation (divorced years later). Dad remarried; mom married once previously, no plans to remarry.

[25] Female, 31, married with three children. Age five at time of parents' divorce. Both parents remarried.

[26] Female, 50, divorced with three children. Age three at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried twice; mom remarried once.

[27] Female, 42, married with 13 children. Age nine at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried twice; mom remarried once.

[28] Female, 47, married with four children. Age seven at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried once; mom did not remarry.

[29] Female, 35, married with nine children. Age (almost) two at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried once; mom remarried three times.

[30] Female, 38, married with five children. Age 21 at time of parents' divorce. Dad did not remarry; mom remarried.

[31] Female, 48, married with five children. Age 12 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom did not remarry.

[32] Male, 51, single. Age eight at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom did not remarry.

[33] Female, 41, married with four children. Age five at time of parents' divorce. Both parents remarried.

[34] Male, 51, married with seven children. Age five at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom did not remarry.

[35] Female, 23, single. Age 14 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom did not remarry.

[36] Female, 61, married (third marriage) with one child. Age seven at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom did not remarry.

[37] Female, 21, single. Age 13 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried.

[38] Male, 50, married with four children. Age 33 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried (second wife later left him); mom never remarried but has been living with a man for 18 years.

[39] Female, 38, married, no children. Age one at time of parents' divorce. Dad had five marriages (one previous and three subsequent to this one); mom remarried twice.

[40] Female, 35, married with three children. Age two at time of parents' divorce. Both parents remarried.

[41] Female, 50, married with four children. Age six at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom remarried, then divorced.

[42] Female, 58, married with five children. Age seven at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried four times; mom never remarried.

[43] Female, 52, married with four children. Age five at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom remarried, then divorced.

[44] Female, 33, married with four children. Age six at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried twice; mom remarried once, then divorced, now in "serious relationship."

[45] Female, 66, married one child. Age eight at time of parents' divorce. Neither parent remarried.

[46] Female, 36, married with two children. Age 18 at time of parents' divorce. Dad did not remarry; mom remarried.

[47] Female, 55, married with five children. Age 25 at time of parents' divorce. Both parents remarried.

[48] Male, 30, married with three children. Age 14 at time of parents' divorce. Dad did not remarry; mom remarried.

[49] Female, 32, married with two children. Age 25 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom did not remarry.

[50] Female, 40, married with eight children. Age five at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried twice (with a few common law marriages as well); mom remarried.

[51] Male, 36, single. Age two at time of parents' divorce. Dad (now deceased) remarried; mom remarried twice, now divorced.

[52] Male, 50, married (second marriage) three children with first wife. Age 16 at time of parents' divorce. Dad (now deceased—suicide) had three marriages (one previous, one subsequent to this one); mom remarried.

[53] Female, 35, married with six children. Age 32 at time of parents' divorce. Neither parent remarried, but mom "carrying on" with older man.

[54] Female, 39, married with one child. Age 13 at time of parents' divorce. Dad did not remarry, has been living with the "other woman" for years; mom deceased.

[55] Female, 36, married with four children. Age seven at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried and divorced; mom remarried.

[56] Female, 38, married with six children. Age 37 at time of parents' divorce. Neither parent remarried (one parent preparing to move in with someone).

[57] Female, 31, married with four children. Age seven at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried once; mom remarried three times.

[58] Male, 48, married with six children. Age six at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried; mom deceased (suicide).

[59] Female, 45, married with eight children. Age six at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried once; mom remarried twice.

[60] Female, 34, married with four children. Age seven at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried, then divorced; mom remarried.

[61] Female, 27, married with three children. Age three at time of parents' divorce. Dad did not remarry; mom remarried.

[62] Female, 56, divorced, no children. Age six at time of parents' divorce. Dad did not remarry; mom remarried.

[63] Female, 55, married with three children. Age nine at time of parents' divorce. Dad (now deceased—suicide) remarried once; mom remarried three times.

[64] Female, 59, married with three children. Age 11 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried (second wife recently left him); mom did not remarry.

[65] Female, 38, married with three children. Age 13 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried twice; mom remarried once.

[66] Female, 36, married (second marriage) with eight children. Parents never married, age three at time of mom's first divorce. Dad remarried "countless" times; mom on her fifth marriage.

[67] Female, 51, married with step-children. Age 12 at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried four times; mom remarried once.

[68] Female, 45, married with three children. Age five at time of parents' divorce. Dad remarried twice (now in prison for child sexual abuse); mom remarried once.

[69] Female, 36, married, no children. Age 16 at time of parents' divorce. Dad (now deceased) did not remarry; mom probably did not remarry (mother and daughter not in contact since divorce).

[70] Female, 47, married with two children. Age 45 at time of parents' divorce. Neither parent remarried.



## Chapter Ten

# Stories of Hope

*From a mother who responded to her child's pleas on behalf of a distressed classmate facing her parents' divorce:*

My fourth-grader had not been her normal exuberant self for several days. When I questioned her about the changes in her happy disposition, she revealed that her school friend was sad because her parents were talking about divorce. Her parents argued, the little girl had told my daughter, but her greatest fear was that her mom and dad would live in separate houses and that she would no longer experience what she understood as “family”—togetherness at the dinner table, togetherness at sports events, and, most of all, waking up to a mom and a dad in the same house.

The little classmate related her sorrows and immense suffering to my daughter, and my little girl took all of it to heart, asking us to pray for her friend and her family, specifically that her parents would not divorce. My husband and I understood the seriousness of the request, and, without delay, we added the request to our family rosary. Additionally, my husband added this intention to his long list of early morning prayers, a list that includes many couples whose marriages are in crisis.

It wasn't long before our daughter approached us again about her troubled friend. And again. In fact, she approached us several times. At one point, she told us that her friend seemed especially distressed and

was crying and grieving during school recess. When my daughter shared her sorrow for her fearful friend, this time more urgently, we assured her that we were praying, and that Dad particularly prayed for the family each day. Our daughter told us that the prayers were good, but it wasn't enough. "*Do something!*" she begged. We knew we had to take action, based on the seriousness of the situation and the plea of our distraught child, whose own personality had changed to the point of causing me worry. My husband, understanding his duty as a Christian man, reached out to the girl's father, who agreed to meet with him.

The day that the girl's father arrived at our home, my husband spoke to him for almost an hour regarding his pending divorce; during that time, I prayed the Divine Mercy Chaplet privately in my room. My husband was able to listen to and then counsel this man about the common struggles of couples, about strategies to overcome marital problems, and about the importance of relying on the sacraments of the Church—allowing Jesus to fight our battles and heal our marriages. This husband and father, by the mercy of God, humbly accepted the advice. He was ready and willing to fight for his marriage.

A couple of months later, my husband received a joyful, grateful text from the man, relating that his wife had rescinded the divorce papers. My daughter's little friend told her the good news at school. The best part, she explained, was that when she wakes up in the morning, she won't be missing her dad.

***From a happily married woman now grateful that her parents did not get a divorce:***

My parents had a very unhealthy marriage. Growing up, my mom and I both had to put up with abuse, not nearly as bad as some, but there were physical and mental abuses. My father was an alcoholic and my mother was a drug addict, and, although they got clean, neither one had any idea how to live a healthy relationship. I can't place all the blame on my father, as my mom could give as good as she got. Despite all these flaws, there was real love between my parents. At the time, I

wanted them to get divorced, thinking that it would solve all of our problems. However, no matter how screwed up their relationship was, they hung in there with each other. When my father got sick, my mom stayed by his side and took care of him for years. She did everything: She cooked, she cleaned, she administered medicines, and she brought him to doctors' offices and even out-of-state hospitals. She took care of her husband, my father, until the day he died.

As an adult, I am very grateful that my parents did not get a divorce. Their relationship was far from perfect, but at the end, his illness brought them closer and changed my father—he was more mellow and no longer abusive. They were both deeply flawed individuals who didn't know how to love each other properly, but they did love each other. And they stayed together through sickness and in health and did not part until death. I don't know, but I think it takes a special kind of strength to do that. So my model of marriage is based on people going through many hardships together—and yes, even putting each other through many hardships—and still being together after all that. It taught me that marriage isn't easy and there is suffering involved, but the fact that they stayed together was, for me, the best witness of all.

***From a woman whose Catholic friends encouraged divorce—a strong word of caution to well-meaning friends:***

I'll save you the full background of my marriage, but it was difficult from the start. I was pregnant when we married, and we struggled in silence during the first few years. Then, one day, my husband finally confessed to me that he had been wildly unfaithful before we got married and had been keeping it a secret for several years. I was devastated. I had recently reverted to Catholicism and took to my private Facebook group of faithful Catholic women to seek advice and comfort. When I shared my story, to my great shock and dismay, I was told by most of them that I needed to leave my marriage. I was told everything from “get a safety plan in place” to “set up a private bank account and start saving.”

At first, I tried to be polite and simply thanked them for their “suggestions,” but I wasn’t interested in leaving my marriage. I was told repeatedly that my marriage wasn’t valid anyway and that I didn’t have to put up with this “emotional abuse” on his part. The funny thing, though, is that the more people told me my marriage was bad, the worse I treated my husband and undermined our marriage. I began to believe that my marriage wasn’t real or precious. Pretty much everyone I shared my story with had nothing helpful to say, and they told me that divorce would be best—or at least inevitable. I had to start defending my husband, which was hard for me because I felt so wronged by him, but he needed me to defend him, even at the same time that I tore him down.

It wasn’t until months later that I realized just how much this “venting” in and of itself was destroying my marriage! I vowed to stop saying negative things about my husband. And I also realized that if I was going to save my marriage, I would be doing it alone. So, I did. I started by telling my husband that under no circumstances, aside from immediate danger, would I ever consider divorcing him. Then, I went about setting up firm boundaries with my husband. If he crossed them, there would be appropriate consequences (but that consequence would never be divorce). Through this process I realized how I had enabled his bad behavior and how we had been destroying each other.

As I changed, so did he. I cut off relationships with friends who had been unhelpful to my marriage. I also enlisted the help of people who had been supportive and who could hold us accountable for our actions. I prayed and focused my mind on the good things in life. And everything changed. My husband transformed from a selfish liar to a man who put his family first.

Are we perfect today? No, but guess what? We are stable. Our fights don’t explode anymore. We find ways to enjoy each other’s company. We take care of each other. I can tell you that it was *not* easy or fun. That was a dark, dark time in my life that I wouldn’t wish on anyone. But the beauty of the storm is the rainbow afterwards. Had I

taken the bad advice and given up without giving it my all, a family would have been destroyed like so many others are.

It's also important to note that that horrible year of marriage, and all of those trials we were put through, started after my husband's first night of inquiry at RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults). I was told that the year of his conversion would be the hardest year of our lives, but I had *no idea* how true that was. Spiritual warfare is real.

If you're in a difficult marriage, divorce isn't the answer, growth is. And we all need to stop perpetuating the kind of victim mentality that was forced upon me when I shared my story. Neither I nor my husband was a victim of the other in our marriage; we were both broken people in need of the other to heal. My husband has taught me many lessons I didn't even know I had to learn, and, I, in turn, have helped him grow to be a person of integrity. He tells me frequently that I'm his moral compass, and he doesn't know what he would do without my influence in his life. The goal of marriage is to get one's spouse to Heaven, and now we keep that goal as our guiding principle.

***From a woman in a struggling marriage who had a breakthrough after many years:***

My marriage was saved by:

1. Frequenting the sacraments
2. Perseverance in prayer
3. The grace of hope in the face of failure
4. Intercessory prayer of every form: Holy souls in purgatory, angels and saints in Heaven, and countless family and friends here on earth. There were several priests who prayed for our marriage and family very fervently and continually, including one who told me in confession, "You are in my chalice." So powerful!

I just want to say that marriage is sacred, and the devil wants *every* marriage. Everyone will be tested. The enemy is looking for the weak link to get in.

When we got married, we were in the best possible state for our young age, emotionally and spiritually. Ours was not a situation of

regret immediately after the vows, or knowing all along it was a mistake; we had a very good marriage for 10 years. That's one thing I held onto when things got so bad; I couldn't fathom divorce when we had had such a great marriage for a sustainable amount of time. My marriage wasn't terrible; it was (and is) holy—that's why the devil wanted to destroy us.

When things got very bad, I left. I took my eight children to a neighboring state to start over, with no real plan to come back. I never stopped praying for my husband. There were gifts and signs that God gave me along the way, even when my marriage was still whole and happy. (For example, while praying the rosary with some friends about six years into my marriage, I felt Our Lady telling me that my prayers had already been answered and that it would just take time for everything to be worked out. I couldn't know then what she meant, as she is outside of time and, unlike me, has the perspective of eternity.)

These gifts—the gifts of my faith and of certain spiritual insights—would be beacons of hope in the piercing darkness, which I could never forget nor leave behind. I never sought to do my own will or achieve “my goals”; I've only ever wanted to unite my will to the Lord's. That's all that ever mattered to me. And so I returned to my home state at the end of the summer, only because I felt guided by God to do so. I always followed the principle that every decision was to be made through prayer and spiritual direction. I have never trusted my own understanding, but always sought wisdom from those who would challenge me and walk with me through the journey. I also based my decisions on my vows and promises to God, and on what the end of marriage is—the salvation of our souls, quite literally.

One very important thing we must understand is that *the battle is not ours to fight*. These simple words were given to me while praying before the icon of St. Michael the Archangel: “It's not your battle to fight.” I took this to mean, for me, that it was not in my power to force God's hand or “pray enough rosaries” to get what I so desperately wanted and needed. This simple phrase broke my chains and helped me focus on loving my children and husband with a greater freedom. I

poured myself into my spirituality. Union with Jesus and Mary was my goal—and not for any reason other than union. It wasn't about the number and frequency of prayers anymore, or about praying to just the right saint. (There was a time that I thought I had to find the right saint who would finally hear my prayers! Later, I realized that God had all the saints lined up to help me all along. I could write a litany about them!) When union with God became all I sought, I experienced so much healing and comfort—and still do.

Al-Anon was also a saving grace and one of the means by which the Holy Spirit taught me. The most important gift was gratitude. Gratitude brought me out of myself and allowed me to focus on *all* that was positive. I also learned about living in the moment—not “reacting” but reflecting—and taking care of myself. I learned that divorce is not the only option, and I found support from other women who chose to stay in their marriages.

No matter how dark and confusing are the storms of life, God will provide peace and clarity in the midst of it all. The peace, for me, came in the form of focusing on the joys and needs *of the moment*. God blessed us so generously with children, and I found great joy in them. I focused on that joy, and it carried me through some of the darkest times. I always told God that I knew He had a perfect plan for every one of our lives, and that He didn't create my husband, me, and our children just to have us make a complete mess of ourselves.

There were two eternal truths that always stuck in my mind: First, ***God will do the most perfect thing, and the most merciful thing.*** Second, ***Jesus wants the salvation of my husband, my children, and me.*** I knew that as terrible as circumstances got, we were allowed to experience it all in His providence, by His permissive will, and that we were *never* not in His hand. God is sovereign, He loves us, and He wants what's best for us. I want to be clear that I did not know what the outcome would be, as we all have free will, and that scared me to death. So many marriages have fallen apart around me—so many families broken. I really thought, time and again, that we were going to be another casualty. It is only by God's grace that we have lived through our ordeal

and made it to the other side. I look back and I seriously don't know how, other than grace, and grace alone. But I praise God that He has saved our marriage.

For those currently struggling: Be ready to fight for your marriage—no matter how crazy or lost it seems. I had dear friends and mentors remind me early on to be very careful and mindful of my vulnerability, specifically my need for affection and attention. I was warned at the start about the temptation of other men. My response then and now was that Jesus is enough for me. He always has been and I pray (knowing what fickle and selfish creatures we can be) that He always will be. I pray every day for the grace to persevere. Jesus is enough for me.

I want to mention two intercessors for our marriage:

First, St. John Vianney, who is pivotal in our life. I could write a book just about that. He was brought to me to announce our deliverance. At a local parish, I attended a one-man play on the life of St. John Vianney, and I walked away from that experience with the realization that the devil's lies are timeless. Every lie the enemy had used on me, I heard at that play that night. I always prayed that my dear husband would cooperate with God's grace, and I always knew that God would act at the moment that my husband would be the most able to receive His grace. I knew God would do the same for me. Trust in Divine Mercy and Divine Providence. I thank God for the terrible years, for I knew He was recreating us through them.

Second, a very faithful and holy local woman, who had recently passed away when I asked for her intercessory prayers. I believe her prayers before the Throne of God resulted in an immediate miracle. Since that breakthrough, my husband has changed. He has been different, and that has remained constant. I know that while she lay sick and dying, she offered up all of her own suffering, and that of her family, to God.

I am so thankful for His love and grace and for the contribution of the Communion of Saints. To God be all the glory!



***From a woman who started her marriage in agony—but God brought it to joy:***

One of the worst days of my life was my wedding day. My dress was exquisite, the venue perfect, and my ring was the envy of everyone—but it was all a sham. On the inside was such turmoil that it is difficult to describe with words, and the only one who truly knew was the Lord. What followed some time later was nothing short of a miracle. His mercy on us was so profound, so overwhelming, that it changed our lives forever.

I was born in the early 1970s, baptized Catholic, but I fell away and was never confirmed. In the 1990s, my life mirrored an episode of *Friends*. I dated several men, and I thought I was a "good girl," being intimate only with whoever was my current boyfriend. Sex always changed the relationship, and the good beginnings never seemed to last. As some friends got married, others of us were starting to become stressed, wondering if the "fairy tale" would ever happen for us. My late twenties were about finding a man with the right marriage and family potential.

When things got really discouraging after a breakup, I'd go to Mass and occasionally confession (and usually in that order—I'm cringing). On one level, I realized I wasn't living the Church's teaching regarding sex, birth control, and reception of the Eucharist, but I wanted to find a husband—and what kind of man would not expect to have sex before marriage, for Pete's sake?! Following Church teaching was just too unrealistic, and so I didn't.

Enter my husband. I met him when I was 27, and we had instant chemistry. He was Catholic, we developed a wonderful friendship at work, and, about a year later, we began a relationship. We were (and are) perfect for each other, and it was as if two puzzle pieces came together. We were intimate right away—after all, it had been building for a year—and we started talking marriage right away. Somewhere deep inside both of us, we wanted a Catholic marriage. Never mind we weren't living according to her teachings, because God "understood," right?

After two and a half years, I was confirmed in the Church and an annulment of his brief previous marriage was granted—now I was just waiting for the ring! The only problem? My perfect groom was cooling and no longer in a rush to the altar. I did what any self-respecting girl approaching 30 would do: I threatened him. I wanted the wedding, the family, the whole shebang! If he didn't give me that, I was leaving! We were perfect for each other, dangit, and my biological clock was ticking! The poor guy, God bless him, proposed. I accepted that proposal, knowing full well it was under coercion. I simply didn't care, and I completely disregarded any legitimate reservations he may have had.

At the same time, my roommate of 10 years got engaged unexpectedly, and I needed to find a new place to live. Reluctantly, I moved in with my fiancé. I justified that we were getting married after all, so it was fine, right? My fiancé was less than thrilled about "moving in together" lest he repeat the mistakes of his past. It was less than ideal, but it was "necessary."

In the following months, things began to fall apart rapidly. He tried to call it off twice. The second time was two weeks before our wedding, and I agreed to the break-up, told my parents, and started to find a new place to live. The whole time I was so angry with him. I couldn't have cared less about how conflicted he felt, about his fears of repeating past mistakes. Ultimately, given that the wedding was two weeks away, we recklessly went ahead with it.

Back to the wedding day: I wasn't sure he was going to show up. It was gut-wrenching and awful, and I was also physically sick, vomiting on the side of the freeway as I drove to my hometown for the big day. He did show up, and, as I knelt down at the altar, I prayed so hard, *Lord, please let this turn out all right, please. I love this man—if only he wasn't being so stupid and wrecking a perfectly good thing.* I believed it was all his fault, but the Lord would soon teach me that I was as much to blame as anyone.

Nine months later, just before Christmas, I was out of the home. We both agreed it was a mistake, and he flat out told me he didn't love

me anymore. We had tried a couple of marriage counseling sessions, but it was no use. My life was in total crisis. I was so angry, and I wanted to hurt him. I came very close to doing things I would have regretted, but, by the grace of God, I didn't. It was then that I started to pray—to *really* talk to God out loud, alone in my little apartment. I hated my husband now and felt he had ruined a real chance at a happy life together.

Then one night, I received a letter from him, saying he truly wanted to try and work things out. Instead of being happy, a crimson hot rage filled me! Now? After he kicked me out? Forget. You. You @#\$%^&\*! I was d.o.n.e.—done.

Enter Jesus and the *Diary* of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska.

St. Faustina's *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul* was given to me by a married couple who were friends of ours, and, after I began to read, I started to wonder if I was making the right decision. I remember one complete meltdown I had, screaming out to Jesus, "What do you want me to do?!" Something happened inside me. I knew I had made a vow in the Church before God, and, if there was any chance it might work, I had to go back. I told the Lord, "Fine, I will go back—but this is on you. I will do it *your* way and not mine"—meaning, I was determined to follow *all* the Church's teachings, not just the ones I agreed with. I decided to go counseling with my husband, and all the while I was reading about the Divine Mercy. The Lord taught me that forgiveness is a requirement and that I needed mercy, not only for my husband but for myself. After going to confession and vowing to live by the Church's teaching, miracles began to happen. After the horrible words that had been said in our marriage, there was a dramatic shift, and my husband's heart completely changed, 180 degrees. A peace and joy washed over me as I kept thinking, *Jesus I trust in You*. He brought us back from disaster and has given us more than we ever asked for.

Yes, the wedding day was awful, but the marriage is now strong, holy, and beautiful. We have both learned to serve and love each other by dying to ourselves, and, although we slip now and then, our foundation is rooted firmly. The Lord knew my heart all along, and He

gave me the family of which I had always dreamed, a dream that had seemed so impossible at times. The graces and spiritual consolations are so numerous, and I don't ever want to be that far from Jesus again. We simply can't do it without Him.

We are now married nearly 14 years, and we have four beautiful children. It was only later—after being diagnosed with a chronic illness just two years ago—that I learned that becoming pregnant was miraculous for me. God's mercy is still blessing us. I will never forget how close I was to divorce and how that one decision to trust Him changed everything. His ways are true and beautiful, leading to our ultimate good.

***From a faithful Catholic, a convert, reflecting on her first (civil) marriage, which included a child:***

My first marriage wasn't a valid marriage. I divorced, received a declaration of nullity, and I now have a sacramental marriage with my current husband. But, had I asked God back then, during my first marriage, He could have worked with what I already had and turned my first marriage into a valid sacramental marriage. Then there would be at least one fewer child of divorce. Also, I could have brought sanctifying grace to my first husband through that sacrament. Who knows what God could have done—if only I had known and had asked.

***From a woman who made it as far as the attorney's office—and changed her mind:***

I was 11 years old and an only child. I spent my teen years knowing that all I wanted out of life was to get married and have a happy family. But by the time I had been married for 10 years and had four children, I was miserable. I actually sat in a divorce attorney's office. But then I realized, there was no way that I was going to do that to my children. I'd rather stay miserable. I canceled the attorney, we got counseling, and the strangest thing happened...we didn't stay miserable! That was a lie! Turns out, there were more than two choices! We ended up

happier than we had ever been. We just celebrated 25 years of marriage, and we now have seven children.

***From a wife and mother of nine who sat in an attorney's office twice:***

People who say they wish their parents had divorced just don't get it. They never lived in a divorced home. Unless the more functional parent gets full custody, leaving the marriage doesn't protect the kids from the abuse, the womanizing, or the whatever-else the spouse didn't appreciate. My husband and I went through with a "shotgun wedding" when I was 19 and he was 20. We were all kinds of stupid and have done every manner of horrid, destructive thing to each other. I have sat in a divorce attorney's office not once, but twice. What has always stopped me at those lowest points was thinking of my children under the care of another woman or under his care without me around. Parents are not meant to parent alone, even in the best circumstances. I'm so thankful that my husband and I didn't give up, as here we are all these years later, closer than ever, and, best of all, raising our children *together*. And we have a history that bonds us! People grow and mature, and sticking together to see that happen is so rewarding.

***From a desperate wife who turned to simple words from a saint:***

What would convince people in a difficult marriage to keep going? This is what changed things for me. I had a moment in which I was feeling there was no hope, and I was very tempted to give up and push for a divorce. That day, I did something that I do when I am in a big crisis. I went to the website *escrivaworks*<sup>9</sup> (the works of St. Josemaría Escrivá) and looked randomly for a quote. The quote I got was this:

"My daughter, you have set up a home. I like to remind you that you women—as you well know—have a great strength, which you know how to enfold within a special gentleness, so that it is not noticed. With that strength, you can make your husband and children

instruments of God, or demons.—You will always make them instruments of God: He is counting on your help.”

All of a sudden, I saw clearly that my place was there, with my husband and with my family, knowing about the pain of the cross, but keeping things in the perspective of eternity.

Now things are going better, but I still keep the quote as a reminder for the times when I feel weak or tired.

***From a wife who had an affair that resulted in pregnancy:***

I want to share something about my husband and myself that only a couple people know. When I was 23 years old and had been married for five years, we were struggling greatly in our marriage. My husband had a friend who would come over a lot. He “comforted” me when I was sad about our marriage, and, long story short, I was unfaithful. I became pregnant with my fourth child—not my husband’s child. My husband was angry, understandably so, but he loved me. I was scared, and he took care of me, and he raised my daughter like his own. She is 20 years old now. She knows of her biological father, but my husband is her dad. I guess, in a throwaway world, we didn’t throw each other away. He and I grew up together, and now we are growing old together. Nobody taught us how to be married; we are both from broken homes. My husband credits our Blessed Mother for our marriage, since his own mother wasn’t around. I hope people will see and hear and live the truth, no matter how unpopular it is.

***From a husband who was unfaithful and sought divorce—twice:***

My wife and I had been married for 13 years with our fourth kid on the way when I filed for divorce. I had moved out, entered into another relationship, and our marriage was over. After a while, I moved back home and ended the affair. We then decided to relocate across the country to give our relationship a fresh start. Unfortunately, that fresh start did nothing to change our relationship, and I would again see a lawyer about filing for divorce.

If anyone in today's society had looked at our marriage back then, they would have said that the best thing for everyone involved was a divorce. It would be better for the kids than the "loveless" marriage they saw every day. During this time, my wife went back and forth between wanting out of this relationship and wanting to stick around for the kids. She came from a divorced family and wanted to avoid that for our children. Every time she felt like it was over, she would pray, and she felt that God was telling her to stay in the marriage.

My wife started seeing the parish counselor who eventually recommended that as a last resort we try a Retrouvaille weekend. I agreed to attend Retrouvaille so I could say one last time "I tried!" I wanted the kids to think I did what I could to save the marriage so they would not blame me when we got divorced. That was nine years ago. We now have seven kids with the eighth on the way. Our marriage was over, twice. We were the poster child for a couple that should be divorced. Luckily we never gave up that last time, and we are happier now than ever.

***From a wife who filed for divorce against her sex-addict husband and changed her mind:***

I found out after three years of marriage that my gentle, kind, and seemingly dependable husband was a sex addict. Cheating, lying, manipulating, a completely hidden life—all of it. I felt like I was dying, couldn't breathe, sleep, or eat for weeks. We had a baby at the time, and we were hoping to have a second child. I desperately wanted to divorce him, because I thought that it would end my pain. I had encouragement from all of my Catholic family, friends, and even clergy that it was okay to get a divorce. But for logistical reasons, I needed to wait a while before filing.

I only had one friend who encouraged me to remain in my marriage. She was also suffering the effects of her husband's pornography use, and so I dismissed her encouragement because I thought that she was just using it as a way to justify her own inability to leave her husband. When I was finally in a position to do so, I filed

for divorce. I asked my friend if she could watch our child for the night so that I could break the news to my husband. She agreed but pushed back on whether or not I really thought that God wanted me divorced. I was furious with her for questioning my decision, but that one sentence planted a tiny seed of doubt in my mind. I ended up telling my husband that I had filed for divorce, but that I wasn't sure if I could go through with it. I told him that our marriage was unsustainable without a complete overhaul. I asked him to move out, commit to recovery, and show me he could keep his marriage vows. Meanwhile, I just watched and waited (and went to therapy and support groups!).

Somehow, against all odds, my husband committed to sustained change and recovery. After more than a year of living apart, we reconciled. We just welcomed our second child to our family earlier this year, and we are happy most days. It's really challenging to be married to an addict, even in recovery, but I'm convinced that divorce would not have solved any of our problems. Reading your stories about children of divorce helps me to remember what a lasting effect divorce has on children when I have bad days where I daydream about divorce. I am reassured that our children are better off having witnessed true, sacrificial love on both of our parts, and I know that my husband and I are both better people and better witnesses of faith, having put in the work to revive our marriage.

It really takes the full commitment of both marriage partners. It does involve radical acceptance and forgiveness on the part of the betrayed spouse, but my experience suggests that it also requires a willingness of the betrayed spouse to work on her (or him) self. This is often the difficulty I see with this particular issue. Yes, the betrayer is the cause of his own troubles. The one betrayed did not cause the betrayal and cannot cure or control the betrayer. *But* the betrayed spouse will only find peace when she focuses inward on how she can become the best version of herself, because that is the only way to joy. I hear so many people scoff at the idea that the betrayed spouse should work on herself because "It wasn't her fault!"—and I adopted that view at first, too. But I was miserable and resentful and full of hate. It was



only when I decided to address my own issues and set appropriate boundaries in my relationships that I was able to find joy, even when my husband wasn't yet in recovery.

***From a woman who is grateful for the sacrifices her mother made for her:***

I'd like to tell you how my parents stayed together despite great difficulties. They were legally divorced for a time and then remarried about five years later. During those five years, my dad moved out once for about six months, and my mom moved out for about six months.

The wounds are horrific. It was a critical time for me, from about third grade to about ninth grade.

My parents did not have a marriage like one should be. My dad had many issues, and I've tried to connect the dots of "did he truly love me if he didn't love my mom the way a wife should be loved?" He was a great dad in every other way *except* for that. I'm married now, with four kids, and I'm so sad that he robbed my mom of what could have been a great marriage. I grieve for her in that way. My dad has been gone for almost 20 years now, and my mom died just about a year ago.

On the drive home from one of her doctor's appointments she told me, "I don't regret my life. I had you children who are my world. I didn't deal with split homes and other families merging into ours. We raised our children and did the best we could." Wow! Such an incredible model of self-sacrifice. I am so glad that my mom told me that before she died.

I prayed and prayed as a little girl that my parents would get back together and we'd be happy. I felt so scorned that God didn't answer my prayer—angry that it took until ninth grade for the remarriage, and that even then, things were not loving between them. I recently had an "aha!" moment when I realized that my prayers *were* answered the best they could be. My parents lived under the same roof and raised us together as a team. Our everyday life was fine, and there was no fighting; even if it wasn't ideal, it was the strongest foundation they could give us. My siblings and I all have good marriages.

I'm so grateful they stayed together, and I miss them every day.  
Thank you for this book, for giving us wounded children a voice.

***From a daughter who was an adult when her parents separated, and how her parents narrowly avoided divorce and became an example to their children:***

We are always our parents' children, no matter our age. I was 27 when my parents' separation took place, and, despite my solid foundation of a happy and stable family life, it just about wrecked me.

When my parents announced their separation, I felt like the loving and safe home in which I grew up was a ruse. Being the only child of four still living at home, I was the only one at the dinner table with my parents when that conversation happened. Walking away from that dinner table, I felt completely alone for the first time in my life. What was once a place of gathering, laughter, and jokes felt like it had become a headstone for the happiness and stability I knew. Phone conversations with my siblings followed eventually, and feelings of disbelief, anger, hurt, and fear were discussed repeatedly. The feelings were raw, exhausting, and unavoidable. We were all adults, so just thinking about how a young child would emotionally handle a divorce, with no way to articulate the depth of his or her feelings—perhaps expressed only as “I’m sad”—breaks my heart into a thousand pieces.

Given the very close relationship between my mother and me, it was especially hard on me when she moved out of the house. However, I understood that she did not want to be distracted or disrupted by my father coming to the house to tend to maintenance issues (mowing the lawn, fixing various things, etc.), which would have happened had he moved out instead. Any feelings of bitterness I might have had toward them were muted by witnessing the pain that each was enduring; it was hard on them, they knew it was hard on their children, and I didn't see the benefit of rubbing their noses in it. To their credit, they were fighting for their marriage—receiving counseling, communicating openly and effectively, and trying to fix what had become fractured.

It was providential that I began weekly Eucharistic adoration just one week before my parents announced their separation. I can never overstate the role that my faith and my weekly appointment with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament played in helping me endure and heal from what was thankfully only a chapter in my life.

I hope my parents recognize the profound example they provided their children. They faced down a perilous outcome that so many other families do not survive—and they survived. They showed us that they took their wedding vows with proper gravity and reverence. They knew they wanted to be together, but, because some of their issues were decades in the making, each did not initially have the confidence that the other could meet him/her on the other side of the forest.

I cannot stress enough the power of prayer in saving my parents' marriage. They had so much prayer covering them during this treacherous time, likely more than I will ever know, but for which I continue to be thankful. I know down to my bones that we receive supernatural graces in the sacraments, and, with that grace, their own prayers, and the prayers of others, they made their way back to each other and defeated the death that is divorce—just in time to celebrate their 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

***From a wife who forgave her unfaithful husband:***

My husband was talking in his sleep again, and I awoke to hear him laughing and carrying on a conversation with someone in his dreams. I nudged him to roll over, which usually does the trick, but this time he began talking more plainly. And then I heard it: "Oh, Jane," he murmured in a way that had always been reserved for only me. *Who the heck is Jane?* I woke him from his sleep and turned on the light, demanding answers. We had dated through high school and had been married 10 years. As he started to explain, a sick feeling rose in my stomach, and tears of both anger and sorrow streamed down my face as he stumbled through his apology.

I got out of bed, got dressed, and headed for the door—2:00 am—I didn't care. I drove to the end of our street, pulled over, and let out an agonizing wail as I sobbed. *How could he do this to me? Why did he do this? I trusted him all these years! That's it—this marriage is over!* I could never trust him again, and his work took him out of town constantly. What about the kids? *We will manage*, I told myself as I finished my crying and headed back home. I promptly told him to pack his bags and get out. He begged me to forgive him, and I flatly refused. I told him I would be filing for divorce, so he should not be surprised when papers were served. He was devastated, and the more my words cut his heart, the better I felt. *Let him feel the pain I am going through*, I told myself. I was both vicious and heartless, as indeed, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned!"

But as the days passed, my anger turned to confusion and sorrow. I didn't understand what I had done to cause this, and all his attempts at excuses were not helping me. On Sunday, I went to Mass brokenhearted and I began to pray—not for him, but for myself. Yet when the congregation rose to pray the Our Father, I stopped with the words stuck in my throat, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...." Forgive or you will not be forgiven—it reverberated in my head and heart. I started to cry again. I could not lose both my husband and God!

We started to talk that afternoon. He asked me to put this all in the past and move on with our lives together. I wasn't sure I could do that, and, while I told him I would forgive him, I would never forget. That was 33 years ago. Yes, I still remember, but the pain is gone. Through time and many trials that would come, we turned our lives back to God. We had both fallen away from our faith and it was high time for renewal. As it turned out, that was the smartest decision we had ever made.

It is impossible to love God and pray to God and at the same time feel anger at the person next to you. We have had our share of arguments over the years, but the anger never lasts more than 24 hours, because I go to daily Mass. To this day, I remember that Sunday

when I prayed the Our Father and knew I had to forgive then, just as I still do today. And if we have a falling out on Sunday morning, you can be assured that when we stand next to each other at Mass and say that prayer together, both of our hearts are softened and we smile at each other knowingly. Keeping God in your marriage is the number-one essential! Live your faith and the vocation to which God has called you both, because when you have God in your life, you will always have love in your heart.

***From a woman whose mother forgave her father, saving the marriage:***

We did not go to Sunday Mass growing up, and faith was not a big part of our lives. When I was a junior in high school, my dad was going through a so-called “midlife crisis” (he was wearing disco shirts and gold chains!). There was trouble at home, with my mom accusing my dad of having affairs. She actually had me follow my dad, and I found him with a 21-year-old girl who worked at his store! I found them together a few times. I felt like my whole foundation, and everything I knew to be true, was ripped apart. My parents separated, and my mom joined this group called Parents Without Partners.

My mom was the best. I worked with her in her business, and, as the oldest daughter, I went through this horrific experience with her. My trust in men was badly shaken, but the Lord later brought me my husband who helped restore that trust. But oh, the pain of seeing all these men wanting to date my mom. One guy was just a few years older than me. Disgusting, right?

Well, when my dad heard that one man wanted to marry my mom, my dad came back on his knees begging her to take him back. It was difficult for my mom, but she did take him back, especially because of my two-year-old sister. It took years for the healing to occur. My dad went to confession after 35 years, and he high-fived me when he came out. A few years after he started going to daily Mass, he said to me, “I don't know what got into me back then! I was so stupid to do such a thing to your beautiful mom.” My mom passed away as a practicing

Catholic, as a Missionary of Mercy<sup>10</sup> for the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity, and with reception of Last Rites. My dad lived another 13 years, and he went to daily Mass—with me at first, then on his own. He, also, died in the state of grace. It was a very tough road going through this with them, but the fact that they did not divorce gave them, and all of us children, time to heal.

***From a daughter grateful for her mother's steadfastness and her father's return:***

It really didn't hit me, the importance of an intact family, until my father's final days. He died in the hospital, where my mother had summoned my sister and me to come and spend those last hours with him. Though by then my father could not speak, it proved a holy and beautiful time. My sister—my only sibling—and I were holding his hand the moment of his passing, and, just then, a tear formed in his eye. I sensed him saying, "I love you." Despite my dad's imperfections, it all came down to this. I will never forget the feeling of gratitude that came over me in realizing that, despite all we'd gone through together, his life had ended with our family intact. My father had spent many of his years in a long battle with alcoholism and away from the Church. I feared he and my mother would divorce. There were times, I'm sure, that I thought maybe they should. Instead, my mother, with prayers of hope in her heart, hung on. In time, Dad went through treatment, began living a sober life, and, shortly after his brother died, he returned to the Church after a 35-year absence. Knowing he had returned to God brought an unfathomable peace. But the peace had also come in knowing that my mother had never left, despite such brokenness and even entire seasons when he neglected his responsibility as a husband and father.

Following Dad's death, I was overcome with gratitude that he had died in God's gentle and merciful embrace. But there was something else, too. I felt such a closeness with my family. Everything was so beautiful about being together, just the four of us in that little room, with no complications from additional family members that divorce

and possible remarriage would have brought. We were intact and as whole as we could be, despite what the world would have dictated, and it felt good. It felt right. It felt uncomplicated and holy, and there was an overwhelming sense of thankfulness to God that our original family was there in that little circle of love, together to the very end. It was the way God had wanted it, I was certain. Despite our loss, we were at peace.

***From a woman who never questioned her own parents' divorce—until she read what the contributors in this book had to say:***

I am 100% Catholic, and I know that divorce is wrong. But after reading what other children of divorce have to say, I'm realizing that from age five and on, I've been essentially brainwashed into believing that my parents' divorce was the right decision. In fact, even as I type this, I still can barely bring myself to question it. I, a diehard Catholic, have said the words, "I am glad you got divorced," and didn't think twice about it. It's only now that I'm starting to think twice...Isn't that crazy? I've never imagined that their divorce wasn't absolutely necessary and that we weren't all better off for it, even though ours wasn't a situation of finding safety from abuse.

My parents so convinced me that it was the right choice—*the only choice*—that I never questioned it. I was raised to believe it was the only option. I have even counseled others against divorce, but never have I ventured to think that my own parents should have remained married. People in your book are telling their parents to "fight harder!" and that never, ever crossed my mind. It's as if these people think their parents weren't supposed to get divorced...and then I'm like, *Wait a minute! They weren't supposed to!*

I think some scales have just fallen from my eyes, and I need to rethink this whole thing.

***And finally, if you wish your parents had divorced, please read the following, which is representative of what others have reported, after***

***realizing how much chaos, suffering, and long-lasting damage comes from divorce:***

I am not a child of divorce, but your posts<sup>11</sup> have been so moving. As I was growing up, my parents always had a troubled relationship; I honestly cannot remember a time they were feeling "happy" together. Ever. My childhood memories are marred with daily routines of 2:00 am screaming matches, slamming doors, drowning each other out with the television—both parents could be really cruel to each other. A few times my mom left for the night, or even a couple of days, and took some of my siblings with her. I often felt abandoned, left with my hardened father, who, for the most part, ignored his family. Until the last couple of years, I really resented my parents and my childhood. My mother often—and still to this day after 30+ years of marriage—threatens divorce. Yet she always comes back to the fact that it's against her Catholic faith. I don't know if my dad ever wanted divorce. Up until I read your posts, I really believed divorce would have been a good, or at least neutral, thing that would have cured the family. After all, I always thought they hated each other. I am now very relieved that my parents never divorced. I see them completely differently now. And while my parents have been self-centered and rather unloving, there has never been anything that makes me feel more profoundly loved than your posts, which, to me, show how ultimately selfless they are for sticking it out. Plus, it sets the bar pretty high for what I must endure before ever remotely considering my own divorce if that day ever comes! At times it has brought me to tears to think of the secret sacrifice they made for us kids. It's just so beautiful and very humbling. So, thank you, and thank you to the contributors who told their stories and changed my heart.



## Chapter Eleven

# What the Catholic Church Teaches on Divorce

*From Scripture, from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), and from Canon Law*

***Divorce, understood as the ending or dissolution of a marriage, is not possible between the baptized.*** Jesus himself forbids divorce, insisting on “the original intention of the Creator who willed that marriage be indissoluble,” and that “a ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power or for any reason other than death” (CCC 2382). Jesus decreed that husband and wife are “no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt. 19:6; cf. Mark 10:9). St. Paul echoes Jesus’ teaching: “To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

***Divorce and remarriage constitutes adultery.*** The Church is clear on this point: “Contracting a new union, even if it is recognized by civil law, adds to the gravity of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery” (CCC 2384). Jesus did not mince words: “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another

commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery” (Luke 16:18; cf. Mark 10:6-8). St. Paul affirms the truth: “Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress” (Rom. 7:2-3).

***Divorce is a “grave offense against the natural law”*** (CCC 2384). The natural law is another term for the universal moral law of God. Each of us is bound to that unchanging moral truth, and there are few things more primal, more inherent in creation itself, than the marriage covenant. Marriage is the basis for the family, and the family is the foundation of every human society.

***Divorce “introduces disorder into the family and society”*** (CCC 2385). Divorce “claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death” (CCC 2384), and flourishing human societies cannot exist where marriages are broken and families are shattered. The disorder of divorce “brings grave harm to the deserted spouse and to children traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them” (CCC 2385). Divorce is never something “just between the spouses.”

***Divorce is “contagious”*** (CCC 2385). Yes, the *Catechism* actually uses that word! And we have all seen it, haven’t we? A woman in a group of friends or a school community gets divorced, talks up the “freedom” she feels, and before you know it, several of her friends are also filing. A man finds a younger, slimmer woman on the internet with whom he declares himself more “compatible,” and his buddies confirm him and even follow suit. Divorce contagion within families is also common. The “contagious effect which makes [divorce] truly a plague on society”

spreads across entire communities, cultures, and even familial generations.

***Divorce and separation are two different things.*** Divorce is an attempt to break the marriage bond (which we have seen, in the first point, is not possible between baptized Christians). But separation is simply that—a physical separation of the spouses. Cutting off conjugal living and physically residing in separate homes may sometimes be necessary, either temporarily or permanently. “The separation of spouses while maintaining the marriage bond can be legitimate in certain cases provided for by canon law” (CCC 2383), specifically CIC 1153 §1: “If either of the spouses causes grave mental or physical danger to the other spouse or to the offspring or otherwise renders common life too difficult, that spouse gives the other a legitimate cause for leaving, either by decree of the local ordinary or even on his or her own authority if there is danger in delay.” And, §2: “In all cases, when the cause for the separation ceases, conjugal living must be restored unless ecclesiastical authority has established otherwise.”

***Civil divorce may be “tolerated” under certain circumstances.*** “If civil divorce remains the only possible way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance, it can be tolerated and does not constitute a moral offense” (CCC 2383). Keep in mind that “tolerance” does not rise to the level of “acceptance” and that a civil divorce does not touch the true bond of the marriage itself, which stands intact between the spouses and in the sight of God.

***Divorce is not a sin for the innocent spouse who is an unwilling party to the divorce.*** “It can happen that one of the spouses is the innocent victim of a divorce decreed by civil law; this spouse therefore has not contravened the moral law. There is a considerable difference between a spouse who has sincerely tried to be faithful to the sacrament of marriage and is unjustly abandoned, and one who through his own grave fault destroys a canonically valid marriage” (CCC 2386). The one

who unjustly divorces his or her spouse is guilty of a grave sin—even if there is no remarriage—and should not approach for Holy Communion. By contrast, the innocent spouse who remains faithful to his or her marriage vows is not culpable for the sin of divorce and, assuming he or she is free from any other mortal sins, is free to receive Holy Communion.

—The above article is a modified version of one I wrote for *Catholic Answers Online Magazine*.<sup>12</sup>

## The Vows

I firmly believe that revisiting our marriage vows would clear up so much confusion and end so much dysfunction in our marriages, sparing untold heartache for countless children facing divorce. But who really looks at their vows past the wedding day? As for me, I never really thought about them again until almost a quarter century later. I asked my husband the other day, and he confirmed that he, too, had never revisited the vows he took. So let's all do that now. For Catholics, the solemn vows made before God and in the presence of witnesses are clear:

***I, (Name), take you, (Name), to be my husband/wife. I promise to be faithful to you, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and to honor you all the days of my life.***

Another option for Catholic vows:

***I, (Name), take you, (Name), for my lawful husband/wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.***

The vows are not easy, but they are simple and straightforward. When we waver in our marriages, let us bring to mind our promises before God. Our sacred vow, our oath, has to mean something. And let

us remember that even if our spouse has chosen to break his or her vow, *our vow still stands*. As St. John Paul II said, “The person who does not decide to love forever will find it very difficult to really love for even one day.”<sup>13</sup>



# Acknowledgments

First and always, I want to acknowledge my beloved husband, Dean. He is my rock.

So many thanks to the incredible women who helped me physically put this book together:

Connie Rossini, author of *Trusting God with St. Therese* and [ContemplativeHomeschool.com](http://ContemplativeHomeschool.com), who prepared both the paperback and e-book for publication just as beautifully as she did for my first book, *Raising Chaste Catholic Men*.

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Finally, deep gratitude goes to my spiritual father, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted, who is, in my and many others' estimation, the greatest bishop in the United States of America today. The Holy Spirit is kicking up a tsunami here in Phoenix, and one only need look at who's at the helm in our diocese to understand why.

Leila Miller

Feast of St. Rita, 2017





# Appendix

## ***SOCIAL SCIENCE ON THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN***

*Torn Asunder: Children, the Myth of the Good Divorce, and the Recovery of Origins,*  
Margaret McCarthy

*Don't Divorce: Powerful Arguments for Saving and Revitalizing Your Marriage,*  
Diane Medved, Ph.D.

*Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce,* Elizabeth Marquardt

*The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: The 25 Year Landmark Study,* Judith S.  
Wallerstein

*Hero: Being the Strong Father Your Children Need,* Meg Meeker, M.D.

“How Good for Children is the ‘Good Divorce?’”  
<http://americanvalues.org/catalog/pdfs/2012-04.pdf>

“Breaking Up is Hard to Do, Unless Everyone Else is Doing it Too”  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3990282/>

Patrick Coffin interviews Dr. Diane Medved about the enduring perils of  
divorce.

<http://www.patrickcoffin.media/videos/perilsofdivorce/>

## ***COUNTERING DIVORCE IDEOLOGY AND THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION***

The Ruth Institute, a global non-profit organization, dedicated to creating a  
Christ-like solution to family breakdown

[www.ruthinstitute.org](http://www.ruthinstitute.org) or [facebook.com/TheRuthInstitute/](https://www.facebook.com/TheRuthInstitute/)

Tell your story here:

<http://www.ruthinstitute.org/for-survivors/tell-your-story>

*Marriage and Equality: How Natural Marriage Upholds the Ideal of Equality... for  
Children,* Jennifer Johnson

(available as an e-book from Amazon.com, or as a booklet from the Ruth Institute)

“Breaking the Sexual Revolution’s New Taboos”

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/breaking-the-sexual-revolutions-new-taboos-141019/>

Luma Simms (who regrets her choice to divorce)

<https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-treachery-of-divorce/>

A quick reminder of what we are up against

<http://www.crisismagazine.com/2017/new-york-times-loves-good-love-story>

### **CATHOLIC RESOURCES, ARTICLES, AUDIO**

Catholic therapists who are obedient to the Magisterium

[Catholictherapists.com](http://Catholictherapists.com)

Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted, Diocese of Phoenix, on the silent pain suffered by the children of divorce

<https://ihradio.com/2017/04/bishop-olmsteds-elevate-conference-homily/>

Mary’s Advocates (working to reduce unilateral no-fault divorce; support for abandoned spouses)

<http://marysadvocates.org>

One of the best interviews I’ve *ever* heard, particularly for understanding male/female brains

Monica Breaux, Ph.D., creator of Wholly Men and Wholly Women programs

<https://soundcloud.com/phoenixdiocese/4-4-17-dr-monica-breaux-1?in=phoenixdiocese/sets/the-catholic-conversation>

Dr. Breaux’s website

<http://monicabreaux.com>

From one of my favorite writers, Professor Anthony Esolen

<https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2015/09/30/the-invisible-child/>

*God Has No Grandchildren: A guided reading of Pius XI’s encyclical Casti Connubii, On Chaste Marriage*, Leila Marie Lawler

<https://www.amazon.com/God-Has-No-Grandchildren-encyclical-ebook/dp/B01M63TMIX>

Excellent diocesan/parish program to strengthen marriage and combat divorce

*Witness to Love*

<https://witnessstolove.org>

Spiritual warfare prayers

[https://www.catholicwarriors.com/pages/warfare\\_prayers.htm](https://www.catholicwarriors.com/pages/warfare_prayers.htm)

### ***CONTACT ME***

Via email

[PrimalLoss@gmail.com](mailto:PrimalLoss@gmail.com)

Via my blog, Little Catholic Bubble

<http://littlecatholicbubble.blogspot.com>



# Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/635160836/All-divorces-damage-the-children.html>)

<sup>2</sup> For more on what chastity in marriage means, go here:

<http://www.catholicwifecatholiclife.com/chastity-in-marriage/>

<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 239

<sup>4</sup> <http://littlecatholicbubble.blogspot.com/2010/10/suffering-catholic-style-part-two-of.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/the-marriage-vows/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/the-questions-before-consent/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.retrouvaille.org>

For troubled marriages, including those considering divorce or already divorced.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.wvme.org>

For good marriages, to make them even better.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.escrivaworks.org>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.solt.net/missionaries-of-mercy/>

<sup>11</sup> For several weeks before this book was published, I put select contributor excerpts on my Facebook page.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/eight-things-you-have-to-know-about-the-churchs-teaching-on-divorce>

<sup>13</sup> In a homily. See also, *Familiaris Consortio*:

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html)

[ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html)