

# **MARRIAGE— Just a Piece of Paper?**

**A Video Discussion Guide  
for Congregations and Communities**

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# Where Are We?

Americans love weddings—the bigger, the better. There is a good reason why we love weddings. The wedding is one of our most enduring social and religious rituals. It speaks to something universal in the human experience. In weddings today, as in the past, the couple makes promises before God and before family and friends to love and honor each other forever. Like the wedding cake, the wedding ceremony is made up of many layers—family, religious rite and blessing, the civil authority, and the witness of the community or congregation. And all these layers support the couple.

The popularity of weddings tells us something about marriage. We prize marriage as a personal goal in life. Most Americans want to marry, and when they do they expect their marriages to be happy and to last a lifetime. There are millions of good marriages. But marriage today faces a historic crisis. Americans are less likely to marry today than in the past, and once married they are less likely to stay married to the same person for a lifetime. Perhaps the greatest change has to do with the way we think about marriage.

## SOME STATISTICS ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

### • DIVORCE

*One third* of people who have ever married have gone through a divorce or are currently in the process of getting a divorce. Enough of those who have not gone through a divorce will eventually divorce, so that at least *half* of all marriages will end in divorce.

### • COHABITATION

More than half of first marriages today are preceded by cohabitation. The average cohabitation either graduates up to marriage or breaks up in a little over a year.

### • SINGLE MOTHERS

In 1960, 5% of all children were born to unmarried women. Now, *one third* of children are born to unmarried women. Among the African American community, nearly *two thirds* of children are born to unmarried women. About half of children will spend some part of their formative years with a single parent.

### • ABSENT FATHERS

40% of children who don't live with their fathers have not seen their fathers at all—not for one second—in over a year. *Half* of children who don't live with their fathers have never—not once—set foot in their father's household.

## DATING

• Surveys of students at today's colleges and universities, traditionally places where young people might meet a future spouse, show that very little dating takes place. Students today tend to "hang out" in groups or "hook up" in casual sexual relationships—neither of which provides them with the skills and experience to select a mate.

Throughout history, marriage had always been more about duty, about family, about property, more about raising children. What we had in the late '60's into the '70's was a real reversal of that. Marriage was about personal happiness and fulfillment more than anything else. What we had was a tremendous increase in expectations of marriage. This person is supposed to be your soul mate, your confidant, your best friend, and your sexually fulfilling partner. The high expectations coupled with the notion that if those expectations were not met you should be able to exit without too much difficulty combined to bring about a very dramatic change in the way we looked at marriage.

William J. Doherty,  
professor of marriage and  
family therapy, University  
of Minnesota

Many couples today aren't sure why we need marriage at all. Couples who cohabit, or live together, are more common today than ever before. Some of these couples live with children—either their own or from previous relationships. The crisis in marriage is also a crisis of single motherhood and absent fatherhood. Men who walk away from pregnant girlfriends very often walk away from their responsibilities as fathers. The rise in divorce, while sometimes a necessary alternative, can also exact a terrible toll in human pain and suffering, for parents and children alike.

With support from extended family, government, and society, some of these new forms of family can and do flourish. Yet new social science data has revealed the fragility of these new family forms—and thus the need for even greater attention and support from the surrounding community. Marriage and family today are experiencing challenges, but these challenges are not new. The good news is there is a great deal that government, community organizations, and especially churches and other religious congregations can do to support the families around them. This video is intended to begin a discussion in your community about the difficulties facing today's families—and some possible solutions.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(1) Describe a wedding you have attended that was especially significant or memorable? What were the elements that made it special? Does the meaning of marriage today ever get lost in the wedding trappings?

(2) What is important about the fact that marriages are usually occasions for public ceremony and celebration? Why do you think 70% of American marriages take place in a religious setting?

(3) What are some of the benefits that come from marriage? How are these important for individuals and for society as a whole?

(4) What accounts for Americans' lesser inclination today than in the past to stay married, or even to marry in the first place? What are our expectations of marriage today?

*For Congregations:* What are some of the elements of weddings that are especially significant in your own religious tradition? What is the purpose of these elements? What do they signify?

# How Did We Get Here?

It was not long ago that things were very different. By the early 1960's, marriage had reached a high point of stability. Thanks to medical advances, people lived longer and their marriages were less likely to be broken by the death of a spouse. Divorce, though not unheard of, was still rare. But marriage faced great changes ahead, as the turbulent decade of the sixties unleashed one revolution after another, each of which would have a profound impact on marriage.

I'm self-sufficient. I don't want to be in a relationship where someone feels that they're obligated to take care of me. Do I think that's what marriage is? I don't know. It seems like everyone that I know that is married is like, the man is taking care of you. It's not like I'm this feminist; it's just that I am a very independent person. I have been for a very long time, and it's really important to me to be able to keep that.

Colleen, single professional

I can't speak for other women who are independent and self-sufficient. All I know is that I have been a threat to a lot of men. They shouldn't be threatened, but they are. Why is it a threat for someone to be able to say no and mean no? Why is it a threat for someone to be able to express how they feel and convey it so that people understand where they're coming from?

Stacey, single graduate student

The feminist revolution opened doors to women in education and work. With new and better opportunities for paid work, women became less dependent on marriage and a male breadwinner. In some groups, like the African American community, women became more educated and more employable than men. Men of all races and ethnicities have suffered from the downturn in manufacturing jobs as we have moved to a post-industrial service economy. These social and economic developments have led to changes in gender roles in the family and placing a premium on communication and negotiation between men and women seeking to balance their work and family lives.

With the sexual revolution, men and women gained greater freedom to have sex outside of marriage. Premarital sex had been around forever, but it was called premarital sex for a reason. Sex was still connected to

marriage, or at least the promise of marriage. The sexual revolution broke that connection. The idea that couples should wait to have sex until marriage seemed quaint or even repressive. One result was a surge in unwed pregnancies and births outside of marriage.

**In 1969, the state of California kicked off a divorce revolution with the passage of the nation's first no-fault divorce law. Until then, the rules governing American marriage were pretty tough. The no-fault law eliminated the old requirement that a divorcing couple identify one or other spouse as responsible, or at fault, for the divorce. By the end of the 1970's, virtually all fifty states had adopted laws that watered down or did away with fault provisions.**

**None of these upheavals in the social landscape had a more profound impact on marriage than the psychological revolution. It emphasized individual self-fulfillment and personal growth and happiness over family responsibility and social obligation. It replaced the language of morality and commitment with a new language of health and happiness. The coincidence of this psychological revolution with a period of economic growth and prosperity meant that the language of the market economy came increasingly to be applied to family relationships, with marriage and family becoming mere "lifestyle choices," relationships that could be easily dissolved when they no longer met one's needs.**

**By the time the revolutions had slowed, and the dust settled in the early '90s, marriage had changed. Legally, it had dwindled into a**

**My biggest struggle is sex. The church says you're not supposed to participate. My thing is that I'm a thirty-year-old sexual being and I like it and you're telling me I can't do it? That's very hard. When people meet, physical attraction is there, and the church wants to try to make that the last reason for two people to come together. It's usually just the opposite of that. How do you juggle that? It's very hard.**

**Stacy, single graduate student**

**I believe the consumer culture has invaded the family. What I mean by that is the attitude that we go through life primarily in the role of a customer or consumer of what the world offers. I think we're entering what I call the consumer culture of marriage. People in my field are starting to talk about starter marriages—with the expectation that your first marriage won't last, that this is like a starter home. There is this notion that marriage is a consumer lifestyle. "It's got to work for me. If it doesn't work for me, I can move on."**

**William J. Doherty, professor of marriage and family therapy, University of Minnesota**

**How do you get married and sustain a wonderful, exciting, alive, emotional relationship for the rest of your life? Marriage wasn't designed to do that. It was designed to help you get food on the table during the next day. It was designed to help you harvest the crops and run the store. Now we're asking this institution to deliver some goods that it didn't think was in the package.**

**Andrew Cherlin, professor of sociology, Johns Hopkins University**

**contract easier to get out of than a contract to buy a used car. Socially, it had dwindled into a private intimate relationship between two single adults. It had become more of a private and personal preference than an institution with broad, public, social, and religious meaning.**

**The crisis of marriage is a crisis of dating and courtship. It is a crisis in our expectations for our intimate relationships. It is a crisis of divorce and its effects on adults and children. It is an upward trend toward single motherhood and new inequalities for women. It is a crisis of fatherhood, with men walking away from their responsibilities or having difficulty adjusting to changes in gender roles. Above all, it is a crisis that raises serious questions about our aspirations for ourselves as a society and the legacy for generations to come.**

We're not passing on any of these values to current young people. Young people today don't have a real sense that they can make a marriage that works. This is a big problem. We wish it was different, but we don't quite know what if anything we can do about it, except wring our hands a bit. We don't know quite if we're willing to change anything fundamental. This period of recognition of the problem, but not being quite sure if we're able or willing to do anything about it.-  
-I think that's really where we are now.

David Blankenhorn,  
president, Institute for  
American Values

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(1) How has feminism changed our notions of marriage and family? In what ways have women's increased workforce participation and economic contribution benefited families? What challenges have the changing roles of men and women introduced into family life?

(2) What is the effect of the sexual revolution on marriage and the dating practices that normally lead up to it?

(3) What is the impact of the divorce revolution on views of marriage in our society? Is returning to a fault-based divorce system an answer to the problems of divorce? What resources exist to help couples who may want to reconcile?

(4) What is the "psychological" or "therapeutic" revolution? Is individualism a problem for marriages and for our society today? Do we increasingly view marriage as a "lifestyle choice" that is disposable when it does not meet our needs?

*For Congregations:* How has your religious denomination or community been affected by or responded to the social and cultural changes ushered in by the feminist, sexual, divorce, and psychological revolutions?

# What About the Children?

With the divorce revolution, people thought they were making life easier by making it easier to get out of a bad marriage. Nobody was thinking about how tough life would be after a divorce. Sometimes divorce is the best solution to a broken marriage, but it is never easy. As time goes on, most adults build new lives and look ahead to happier times. It doesn't work that way for children.

Bewilderment is the first thing that many children feel when their parents tell them they are getting a divorce. According to marriage and family researchers, children, no matter what their age, fear abandonment. Another thing changes for children in a divorce. At divorce court, a stranger in a black robe begins to make decisions about the children's daily life. The stranger decides where they will live, whom they will see on holidays, and who will pay for their support.

Most children of divorce recover as time passes. The hurt, anger, and fear subside. Many go on to lead happy and successful lives. Most eventually marry and have children themselves. Some are especially determined to make their relationships work—to do a better job than their parents. But the memory of divorce lingers. It is hard for children of divorce to shake the feeling that, just when they least expect it, their lives and their relationships could suddenly come apart again. Many in this generation fear divorce and want to make their relationships work. Fortunately, new

Divorce in the life of a child is entirely different than in the life of an adult. For an adult, it is a remedy. But for the child, it's not a remedy, it's the loss of the family. For them there is often a disruption of physical care as well as the sense that the world is becoming an unreliable place. They don't know what's going to happen and who will take care of them. They are afraid; they're genuinely fearful in a very concrete way that if one parent can leave another, what is to keep both parents from leaving them? And the logic is irrefutable.

Judith S.  
Wallerstein, author,  
*The Unexpected  
Legacy of Divorce*

The judge can be very nit-picky and decide what time, where, and exactly what the child is going to do. And I've never been invited to dinner at their home. I don't know their lives, their families. They're putting all of this into the hands of a total stranger when they can't make those decisions themselves. That ought to scare any parent.

Judge Helen E. Brown,  
Family Division, Wayne  
County, Detroit, MI

**research is shedding new light on the causes of divorce and on the relationship and communication skills that can prevent it.**

The residue in adulthood is the fact that all, and I say this very carefully, of the children of divorce, as adults, suffered with a residue of symptoms in which they were afraid that disaster would strike suddenly, unaware. The happier they were, the better their life, the better their job, the better their love life, the better their relationship, the better their children, the more frightened they became that they would lose it.

Judith S. Wallerstein,  
author of *The  
Unexpected Legacy  
of Divorce*

My generation, whose parents stayed together, felt like we could experiment more with getting out of marriages more easily. We sort of took for granted the families that we came from, and we wanted to liberate ourselves. Now we have a generation coming along that is no longer taking stable marriage for granted. In fact, they've experienced the other side and they are sobered by it.

William J. Doherty,  
professor marriage and  
family therapy, University  
of Minnesota

My students tell me their stories or write about them, but the sad thing is that they often don't make the connection between their own problems and the fact that their basic family or community system has eroded. I think one of the biggest crimes here is that you have a generation of young people who have clearly been the shock absorbers for a massive breakdown in parental partnerships. Nowhere are we helping them understand their own personal issues or the problems of their generation. They just got the rug pulled out.

Marline Pearson, social  
science instructor, Madison  
Area Technical College,  
Madison, WI

**Recent data suggests that successful couples disagree with the same frequency as those who divorce and about the same things. The difference between successful and unsuccessful couples is *how* couples disagree. Successful couples disagree in ways that make their relationship stronger, using skills and attitudes that help them build long-term happiness and satisfaction. The good news is that many of these skills can be taught. A variety of premarital education and marriage enrichment programs have sprung up in recent years to do just that.**

**Other data have shown that, while children are negatively affected by high-conflict marriages, they are not as aware of lower levels of parental conflict. While no one is suggesting that parents stay together for the children, particularly in cases of violence and abuse, it is increasingly apparent that spouses in lower conflict marriages can reconcile their differences in ways that benefit their marriage and their children.**

## STATISTICS ON DIVORCE

- 64% of Americans polled say that divorce almost always or frequently harms children. But only 33% believe that parents should stay together for the children's sake if the marriage isn't working.
- In various polls as many as 40% to 66% of divorced people express regrets about their divorce and wish that they had tried harder to reconcile differences with their spouse.

The research is incredibly dramatic. It finds that happy, sexily married couples that go the distance have, all of them, approximately ten irreconcilable differences. Couples that go the distance, that stay happily married, disagree the same amount as the couples that divorce and about the same things—money, sex, kids, others, friends and in-laws, and time.  
Diane Sollee, Founder and Director, Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(1) What are some key differences in the ways that adults and children experience divorce?

(2) Some therapists have suggested that there may be cases in which a “good divorce” is possible. Are there circumstances in which divorce may be the best solution to marital strife? What can divorcing parents do to make the transition easier for their children in such cases?

(3) Are there circumstances in which divorce can be prevented? What are some ways in which couples can attempt reconciliation?

(4) What are some of the long-term effects of divorce that some children of divorced parents face as they move into young adulthood and start to form their own relationships? How can these be addressed?

*For Congregations:* Does your congregation have resources to help couples and families affected by divorce? What are they?

# Looking for Love—Living Together

For young singles today, the pathway into marriage has changed. People used to marry so that they could live together. Now people live together so that they can figure out whether they want to be married. Contemporary sociologists who study cohabitation account for the phenomenon in a number of ways.

Some say that the trend toward delayed marriage and a reduction in the stigma attached to cohabitation makes it convenient and socially possible for young adults to live together. Others say that delayed marriage is itself a direct consequence of increased cohabitation. Some say that people who live together come into the relationship with values of independence and autonomy that lead them not to want to marry in the first place. Some say that patterns of relationship and communication that develop in cohabitation cause instability in relationships. Couples who want to avoid conflict that might break up their relationship avoid direct communication that might serve to strengthen their relationship and lead them toward marriage.

## STATISTICS ON COHABITATION

- A quarter of unmarried women aged 25-39 are currently living with a partner, and half have lived with a partner at some time.
- 66% of high school senior boys and 61% of high school senior girls believe that it is a good idea for a couple to live together before marriage to find out if they really get along.
- 44 percent of single men, 20-29, agree with the statement that they would only marry someone if she agreed to live together first.

You shouldn't really wait until you're married to have sex. Knowing how someone is intimately is so important. Can somebody meet your needs? Can you express your needs to them? You have to know that. And I sort of think you might even want to live together before you get married because you have to know these things before you go and get married--if it is such a big step in terms of making a commitment.  
Kristen, single woman

Cohabitors very definitely don't get the emotional benefits of marriage, which especially for women, and especially for women with children, come with feeling like this person's going to be around for a while—that they're committed to you. They're working for you and with you and you're working as a team. And in cohabitation you're not working as a team. You're just sort of together on the bus.

Linda Waite, professor of sociology, University of Chicago

We were living separately for most of the time until about the last eight months, when we started to live together. Wonderful girl. I cannot say anything bad about her. Beautiful. Very intelligent. We had a lot of the same ideals with religion and family. I received an acceptance letter to graduate school and it was either get married and she would move up her with me or I would end it there and go it alone. I said I couldn't move forward with the relationship. I thought she would slow me down in what I want to accomplish at this stage of my life.

Scott, graduate student

**One reason living together is so popular today is that young people are acutely aware of the risks of divorce. They think that living together before marriage will reduce the likelihood of divorce and increase their chances of having a successful marriage. Some also believe that cohabitation will give them the advantages of marriage without the legal commitments. For them, cohabitation, serves as a “trial marriage.”**

**Recent studies have shown that marriage increases physical, mental, sexual, financial, and social health for both men and women. But the same studies have also shown that cohabitation is a poor substitute for marriage in providing these benefits. While cohabiting partners report more frequent sex and personal freedom than married couples and singles, they score lower than married people in terms of health, wealth, and happiness. They also report lower levels of trust, commitment, and intimacy in their relationships.**

**Cohabitation also has different effects on the basis of gender. Living together was once associated with feminism, progress, and ideals of greater autonomy for women and greater equality between men and women in relationships. Cohabiting women today are more likely than cohabiting men to view cohabitation as a prelude to marriage. Yet cohabiting women report lesser levels of happiness and sexual satisfaction. Studies suggest that the perception that their partner is committed to them is a key factor in boosting women's emotional health and sexual satisfaction.**

It is hard to know if it is the right person. You have so much doubt because so many people do get divorced and there are people I know, my age, who've been married seven years. You know, they have kids, but things aren't working out.

Claudia, newlywed

Marriage at this point? I don't know, we'll have to see. I think our main concern right now is being financially prepared for when the baby is born. I know that the love is there and the support is there, and encouragement. Who knows? We may be together for many, many years and not take that final plunge into marriage.

Antonia, living with John and expecting a child

Right now our focus is on the baby, and that's all we need to focus on right now. We know we'll be together. We're partners. We don't need to put pressure on going through the whole ceremony right now just to make other people happy—you know, to do it traditionally. I think I will wait to do it right, you know—to make it a special day when we're financially and emotionally ready. And when I can take her on the vacation of her dreams, you know.

John, living with Antonia and their newborn daughter

Men who cohabit express a preference for living together as a relationship that gives them sexual and other benefits of marriage without the financial and emotional risks of divorce. They want to wait until they are older to have children and tend to avoid women with children and women who want children too soon. Many express a desire to be financially prepared, especially through home ownership, before they assume the responsibilities of marriage and family. They seek a perfect “soul mate” and hope that marriage will not require them to make too many changes and compromises. Until they find their perfect partner, they plan to enjoy single life, free from social pressures to marry. Of course, in most cohabiting unions the balance of power tilts to the partner who is less committed and more likely to walk out. In most cases, the walkers are more likely to be men.

Some cohabiting couples delay marriage until they can afford the wedding of their dreams. In the meantime, a growing percentage of those couples also have children. However, cohabiting parents often do not make it to the altar. Cohabitation relationships are likelier to break up than marriages. This places children in greater jeopardy of family breakup than kids born to married parents.

## COHABITATION AND CHILDREN

- Half of all cohabiting couples aged 25-34 have children living with them.
- An estimated half of all children today will spend some time in a cohabiting family before they reach their sixteenth birthday.
- Over the last decade the percentage of cohabiting mothers who eventually marry the father of their children has dropped from 57% to 44%.
- Three quarters of children born to cohabiting couple will see their parents split up before they reach age sixteen, compared to a third born to married parents.
- While the 1996 poverty rate for children living in married couple households was about 6%, it was 31% for children living in cohabiting households, putting it closer to the rate of 45% for children living in families headed by single mothers.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(1) What are some of the common reasons that couples today give for living together outside of marriage? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of this arrangement?

(2) Do most cohabiting couples plan eventually to get married? What do such couples hope to learn about one another from living together? Is cohabitation effective as a "trial marriage"?

(3) Are there gender differences in men's and women's expectations of cohabitation? What are these expectations? Are they met in a cohabiting relationship?

(4) What are some differences between marriage and cohabitation?

*For Congregations:* What, if anything, does your religious tradition have to say about cohabitation? What pastoral advice does your congregation give to cohabiting couples? How does your worship community respond to cohabiting couples?

# Looking Back—Have We Been Here Before?

The problems between men and women may seem new, but they are as old as humankind. Through marriage, societies have struggled to find ways to reconcile men and women to each other for their own mutual benefit and for the benefit of their children. The religious wedding ceremony gives us a glimpse into the history of this struggle. Peel back the layers of the wedding and with each layer, you see one of the accomplishments of marriage.

In ancient societies marriage was mainly an arrangement between families. Often families ignored the wishes of the couple. Even though marriage was a family event, it confronted serious problems in the centuries that followed the fall of the Roman Empire. In fact, marriage was a mess.

The Roman Catholic Church made an important contribution to marriage in the Middle Ages. It helped define marriage as a matter of free consent between husband and wife rather than as a contract between families. Basing marriage on consent was an accomplishment for the Church in the Middle Ages. But it also led to ambiguities, misunderstandings, and sometimes to legal disputes. One problem was the widespread phenomenon of secret marriage, whereby a couple declared themselves to be married with no public witnesses. This gave rise to many cases in which a woman believed herself to be married, but the man denied that any marriage had taken place.

The Western Christian tradition has treated marriage in at least four different perspectives concurrently. First, marriage is a *spiritual*, or even a *sacramental* institution subject to the creed, cult, codes, and canons of the church community. Second, marriage is a *social* estate subject to the expectations and exactions of the local community and subject to norms of charity, care, and the like. Third, marriage is a *contract* dependent on the voluntary consent of both the man and the woman and subject to the wills and preferences of the couple, the children, the dependents, and sometimes the whole household. Finally, marriage is a *natural* association created and ordered by God and subject to moral and natural laws as communicated in scripture, tradition, reason, conscience, intuition, and custom.

John Witte, professor of law, Emory University School of Law

The state does have a role in marriage. It is a human institution. It's not just a matter of individual welfare. It's a matter of social welfare. A marriage relationship is a form of social relationship. It's a basic institution of most societies, including our modern society. Therefore, the state should have a role, because it's interested in the welfare of society in general and the common good in our interdependence with one another and our duty to support one another.

Lisa Sowle Cahill, professor of theology, Boston College

That contractual understanding of society, which has a particular expression in the contractual understanding of marriage, reduces marriage, ultimately, simply to an institution that two individuals choose for their own convenience. That notion becomes increasingly sterile.

John Witte, professor of law, Emory University School of Law

In the sixteenth century, both Protestants and Catholics tried to correct the confusion of secret marriage by making marriage more public. The Roman Catholic Church began to require parental consent, witnesses, state registration, and church consecration as a matter of canon law. Protestants insisted on the public dimensions of marriage through requirements of civil registration and church consecration. It was during this time that the state became a full partner with the church in certifying and protecting marriage. This was an historic watershed in the creation of modern marriage.

But by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, marriage was beginning to change in the modern mind. It shifted from being viewed as a sacrament or covenant with broad public meaning to a private contract between two adults. The Enlightenment idea of contract elevated the rights of the individual

in marriage. The downside of the new marriage contract was that it began to look more and more like a business deal; whereas the religious wedding sought to unify the contractual element of consent with a sacramental element of commitment.

Marriage has never been perfect, and it has often been terribly imperfect. Some marriages are bad, and many people have been hurt, betrayed or abandoned by their spouses. Divorce is sometimes the best remedy for a bad marriage. Some people should never marry. But over the long arc of its history in the West, marriage has been able to achieve a balance between the interests of individuals and the society, the desires of adults and the needs of

**children, between church and state, between contract and the bonds of a sacred covenant. Today we may be losing that balance.**

This idea that the family did not really exist until modern times reflects a great lack of knowledge. It's also a great exercise in hubris. What one discovers in family archives is a vibrant relationship between spouses and even more vibrant relationships between parents and children. I personally subscribe to the view that the so-called "sentimental" marriage and family existed as far back as there are sources to document it.

When we look at history, we need to look at what is really happening between people, try to hear them in their own words, on their own terms, and within their own space. For example, one finds an account book where a father is listing the money he spends on servants, taxes, and the like. All of a sudden he'll list buying a new bed for his child, and he'll draw a little box around it with flowers, or call attention to it by fluffing it up with extra ink scribbles. It's obvious what's really important to this man. In the midst of his everyday life, he treasures and values his family and his children.

Steven Ozment, professor of history, Harvard University

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(1) What can we learn from the history of marriage in Western Christianity? What are some aspects of the history recounted in this video that you did not know before or which struck you as especially relevant to the situation of marriage today?

(2) How is the history of marriage reflected in elements of the marriage ceremony?

(3) What are the natural, contractual, social, and sacramental aspects of marriage? To what extent are each of these present in marriage today?

(4) Are there any elements of marriage that have been lost over time and which you think should be brought back? How might these ideas and practices be retrieved in today's society?

*For Congregations:* Are there elements of your own religious tradition's theology and practice of marriage that have waxed and waned over time? Are there earlier practices and rituals that have dropped out but which might be valuable today?

# A Single Mother's Story

The history of marriage has been full of change and transition, from arranged marriages to mutual consent, and from covenant to contract. But are we starting to separate marriage from family, church, and state? Is it just a private contract? What happens when marriage disappears? One current trend is that more and more women are living supporting children on their own. Contrary to the “Murphy Brown” image, many of these women are just a babysitter and a paycheck away from financial disaster.

The shift away from marriage to low-commitment relationships has contributed to a new source of inequality for women and children. In the 1960's and 1970's, many people believed that freedom from the bonds of marriage would liberate both men and women. But as it turned out, freedom from marriage liberated men more successfully than it liberated women. Men reduced their commitments to the minimum legal requirements. Women had to take on bigger responsibility for both breadwinning and caring for children in the household, leading in some cases to what some have called the “feminization of poverty” affecting both women and children.

Much of the discussion of single motherhood has tended to focus on the issue of teen pregnancy. These mothers tend to be the most fragile and need a variety of forms of social support. However, rates of teen pregnancy have been declining in recent years after reaching an all-time high in the mid-1990's.

We talked about marriage, but that was before the word pregnant ever came up. As soon as I said I was pregnant, he told me that he hated me, that he wasn't sure he was the father, that he had another girlfriend and that she was also pregnant and he was marrying her. That turned out to be a lie and that was just to manipulate me into having and abortion. And, no, he never talked about marrying me after I was pregnant.

Being alone is hard, you know? I have Isaiah, but it's not the same. It's nice to have someone there at night to help you with doing the dishes and cleaning up and changing diapers and doing laundry and all that kind of thing. So I think that being married would be ideal if you're going to be having babies. I don't recommend being a single mom. It's hard work.

Sadie, single mother

## STATISTICS ON SINGLE MOTHERHOOD

- Between 1975 and 1994, the rate of teen pregnancy doubled, reaching an all-time high in 1994.

- Between 1991 and 1997 the total teen birth rate dropped 16% overall and 25% among African American teens.

- Still, more than 40% of teen girls in America will become pregnant before they reach their twentieth birthday.

- Unwed mothers under age 18 account for only 13% of babies born out of wedlock.

- The unwed birthrate for white women in their early twenties has risen 136% since 1980.

- In a study of the dating habits and marriage expectations of a group of young adult men and women, *half* of the women said that they would consider unwed motherhood an option if they were unable to find the right man to marry.

- Only 28% of unwed mothers who expected to marry within five years did so, compared to 45% of single women who remained childless.

- As recently as the early 1990's half of unwed mothers received no child support at all and of the half that did receive some support, less than a quarter got the full amount they were due.

What *has* increased in recent years is the number of children being born out of wedlock to adult women in their twenties and older. These mothers are part of the “single mother by choice” trend, popularized by the controversial television sitcom “Murphy Brown,” in which the leader character, a high-powered media executive, opted to have and raise a child on her own.

Some argue that the problem is not teen pregnancy, but rather unwed parenthood and the cultural factors that lead both teens and young adult women to forego marriage. Outside of marriage such mothers often end up raising the child not only without the support of a father, but in some cases with very little social support of any kind. All this despite the considerable personal, economic, and social costs of raising a child alone.

In light of these often difficult realities of single motherhood, some have called for government programs to encourage unwed parents to marry and to teach them the skills necessary for effective parenting. Increasingly, state governments have been debating the merits of these pro-marriage policies as a way to achieve welfare reform. Some have criticized these programs for unnecessarily targeting the poor. Others argue that these programs provide the less well-off with

There certainly are women who believe that the decline of marriage has been really harmful to women and it has let men off the hook. They believe that men, who have problems with commitment anyway, are less committed, less responsible as fathers, etc.; and therefore they want a marriage system that would give them more security.

I believe women who look to marriage as their primary form of security need to be very careful about how vulnerable they're making themselves. I believe that women want to have a secure relationship that is not based on inequality and dependence. I would be for making and honoring commitments based on equality and a fair situation.

Judith Stacey, professor of gender studies, University of Southern California

**resources—such as marriage and parenting education or discounts on marriage licenses—to which they would not otherwise have access and which help to support and strengthen otherwise fragile families.**

**Another question that some raise about single motherhood today is whether it leads to new inequalities for women, to the detriment of both women and their children. These observers point to statistics that show that children of single mothers are less well-off than children in intact, two-parent families and express concern that women and children are spiraling downward into poverty while men avoid responsibility.**

**Much of the discussion of out-of-wedlock childbirth focuses on the mothers, since they are the ones who give birth and still assume much of the responsibility for child-rearing, particularly of young children. Yet the flipside of single motherhood is father absence—an issue we will take up after a brief examination of today's culture of sex and dating.**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(1) Does it surprise you to learn that, while rates of teen pregnancy appear to be dropping, more women in their twenties and thirties are choosing to become single mothers?

(2) What are some of the factors that lead women to become single mothers?

(3) What does the phenomenon of single motherhood say about relationships between men and women today? Does the rise of single motherhood result in greater or lesser equality between men and women?

(4) Should marriage be encouraged—by the church, the state, or society--as a solution to the problems of out-of-wedlock births?

*For Congregations:* In what ways can your congregation support and assist single parents in your community?

# Looking for Love—Sex and Dating

**The American experience today is that people are staying single longer than at any time in the past century. Whether or not singles want to marry, most of them want what they call a “soul mate.”**

**Many single women today report difficulty in finding the right man. Some think that their independence threatens the men that they date. Single adults of both sexes, particularly those trying to live up to the teachings of their faith, see sex as one of the biggest struggles. Although their religions may say to wait until marriage to have sex, the reality for men and women in this generation of extended single adulthood is that sex doesn't wait.**

**The Big Black Book. God says don't have premarital sex. I don't know how he says it. But I just believe that when you have premarital sex there's a possibility of getting pregnant, and when you're not really ready to take care of a kid together it creates a problem. So I think that sex is for married people. And I'm really working on that right now. I'm quitting premarital sex!**

**Nissa, twice divorced and dating again**

## STATISTICS ON DATING

- The average woman in America gets married at about age 25, and the average man at about 27.
- 83% of college women in a national survey said that being married is an important goal for them.
- 63% of these college women expressed a hope to meet their future husband in college.
- Only 50 percent of college women seniors reported having been asked on six or more dates by men since coming to college, and a third of women surveyed said they had been asked on two dates or fewer.
- 78% of religiously-oriented college women report having a clear sense of how to behave in romantic and sexual situations, compared to 37% of nonreligious college women.
- 87% of college women, including nearly equal percentages for religious and nonreligious women, say they should not judge anyone's sexual conduct except their own.

**One recent survey of the values and attitudes of college women regarding sexuality, dating, courtship, and marriage reveals that marriage remains a major aspiration for young women today. Many would like to meet their future spouse at college, but feel hindered by a dating scene that seems to undermine the likelihood of achieving the goal of marriage. Caught between the equally undesirable alternatives of “hooking up” relationships based on short-term sexual commitment or “joined at the hip” relationships that become too serious too soon, both sexually and emotionally, these young women desperately seek a courtship culture in which they can get to know potential mates well before settling into a permanent relationship.**

**Many young adults opt to avoid these extremes by “hanging out” in groups with both sexes. Formal dates are rare in this dating environment, as are resources to guide and support them in thinking about sex, love, commitment, and marriage. Also in short supply is adult involvement, guidance, and knowledge of how young people are meeting and dating today. Parents, educators and other social leaders have largely stepped away from the task of guiding young people into intimate relationships and marriage—leaving a place where churches can step in.**

I am not looking for marriage at all. Just dating. Why? The difference is that marriage is a lifelong commitment, and I am not ready for that. It's a lifelong contract, it's legally binding, and there is no other contract that people sign into so readily as marriage and break so easily.  
John, college student

I think being married is really great. I mean to have the support of somebody else that you know is always going to be there. We have a lot of single male friends who are hitting their thirties. Now that they're ready to settle down, they're having a really hard time finding somebody, and I feel really bad for them.  
Leslie, married mother of three

You know, I just can't find someone that I truly like right now. In a perfect world, I'd like to marry a perfect woman. You know, sweet, nice, someone that I can have a conversation with. But I think I may have lost the one chance that I had. They say you get that one chance in a lifetime. I think maybe mine was here and gone. First good girl I meet, I'm getting hitched!  
Dino, single man

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(1) What is dating and courtship like today? What opportunities do young adults have for meeting a potential spouse in today's dating culture?

(2) What do you know about the dating practices of adolescents in your community? If you are in one of the older generations, how have things changed since when you were a teenager or young adults? Which changes have been positive and which negative in your view?

(3) What can churches, schools, and other social institutions do to help teens and young adults in thinking about sex, dating, and marriage?

*For Congregations:* What does your religious tradition teach adolescents and young adults about sex and dating? Is the message being heard? What kind of outreach or programs does your congregation have for teenagers and single adults on matters of sex and dating?

# What About Fathers?

**The crisis of marriage is a symptom of deeper changes in relationships between men and women. The breadwinner role is no longer exclusively the man's role. Women bring home the bread, too. And, as we have seen, many single mothers are the only wage-earners in the family. Men still earn more than women, but that's changing rapidly. In a quarter of marriages today, wives earn more than their husbands do. Except for the very well-educated, male wages have declined in the last twenty-five years.**

**Women are also going on to college in higher numbers than men. In the African American community, twice as many women graduate from college. What's more, given the current high rate of divorce, most young women of all races and classes see education as a more reliable route to economic security than marriage. They are determined to take care of themselves.**

**But women's greater independence has led to confusion and uncertainty about men and their roles. This problem is especially acute in the African American community. A significant number of young African American men in our nation's inner cities grow up in foster care or on the streets. They are a living legacy of decades of urban poverty and discrimination, along with the longer and darker history of slavery and racism. Talk to these young African American men about what troubles them and the conversation inevitably comes around to their own fathers.**

In the African American community, men always considered themselves the head of the home, but we didn't have this concept that women were oppressed. In fact, in the African American community there was more of a matriarchal society. But there is no question that women, across the board have felt a sort of sense of freedom. They are better educated today than they were in the past. Jobs are more available. Sometimes men have been unable to adjust to the fact that when your wife goes to work you lose a modicum of power and authority.

Rev. Arthur Brazier,  
Apostolic Church of God,  
Chicago

I think my father was probably an exemplary individual who had all of the aspirations for a family. But because he could not provide for us on a consistent basis, he was not there emotionally. And I struggle with this now with my children. I find myself not being equipped with the necessary skills to lead them into manhood and adulthood.

Charles, African American  
father

**Many who work with these men believe that young men respond best to older men who care about them, set rules for them, and stick by them when they are in trouble. Family researchers have also begun to document the important role that fathers play in the lives of daughters, building their self-esteem and modeling healthy relationships with men. In a world where many children are raised by working single parents, many also see the answer in a broad-based effort to educate the generation coming up. This education would boost social commitment to childrearing overall and especially support the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.**

**Perhaps in the future it will be possible to get young men to become more responsible fathers. But in the meantime, these stories of single mothers and absent fathers raise crucial questions for our society. Can men and women be reconciled to each other in the midst of changing gender roles? Is marriage part of that work of reconciliation? How can society support an ideal of married motherhood and married fatherhood, while at the same time providing crucial support to mothers and fathers who may be unmarried or divorced?**

The older men of the community must become more vocal. If you are going to get married, there are three things that my father told me: love your wife, pay your bills, and take care of your children. It's going to take the men in the village to teach the boys in the village how to be the next generation of men. If we don't teach them, no one's going to teach them and it's going to repeat.

Keith, African American father

It was the divorce I remember the most. My dad, he never really called to check on me. He never called on my birthday or anything like that, or to see how I was in my new school. I got really wild. I was boy crazy—not sexually, just boy crazy. Looking back, I was starved for a man. Any attention from a boy was like a drug. I don't know who I was mad at. I don't know if I was mad at God or my dad. It probably points a little more to my dad.

Nissa, child of divorce, twice divorced herself

We need to support and encourage involved fathering and divorced fathers and unwed fathers. At the same time, we can't just say these are just many different choices—because they are not all the same. It is harder. We need to be honest about that. It is a more difficult experience to be a father if you do not live with your children.

Wade Horn, Asst. Sec. For Families and Children, Dept. of Health and Human Services

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(1) What roles do fathers play in families today? How are they important influences in the lives of their sons? Of their daughters?

(2) What are the factors that lead fathers to become absent from the lives of their children? What impact does this have on their children? On society?

(3) What role does marriage play in securing men's attachment to families? What are some of the benefits of marriage for men?

(4) What can be done to help all fathers—married, unwed, divorced—be more present in the lives of their children? What is the role of the church? Of government?

*For Congregations:* How does your congregation support fathers in being better husbands, more effective parents, and important influences in the lives of their children?

# Where Are We Going?

**Today almost everyone would agree that something has gone wrong with marriage. About four in ten marriages will fall apart. Millions of other couples will never get married, even if they have children together. These concerns have sparked a marriage movement, a controversial and diverse new effort to support marriage. It is made up of liberals and conservatives, people of faith and people from the secular world. Some people advocate marriage education. Others say that government has to get involved. Others think businesses and employers should play a role in supporting families. Still others think that faith communities should do more.**

**Religion has always supported marriage. But leaders in the marriage movement believe that more needs to be done. Mentoring programs for couples and participation in community marriage initiatives to support “covenant marriage” are two of the many ways that churches and religious leaders are addressing the issue.**

**The marriage movement has gained confidence from new research showing that married people enjoy greater physical and mental health, live longer, amass**

**We have reached a judgment, based in part on morality, but also now, sadly, on the experience we’ve had with broken families and also based on evidence, that the best way for a society to raise its children is in a two-parent, mother-father family. So we want to do whatever we can to encourage that.**

**Sen. Joseph Lieberman,  
(D) Connecticut**

**If you’re going to have strong marriages today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they are marriages that have to be built on the fact of economic interdependence and equality between men and women. Equality doesn’t mean the same in all respects, at all points in the life cycle. The roles of men and women, even when they are equal roles, will be different and will shift over time.**

**William Galston, Director,  
Inst. for Philosophy and  
Public Policy, School of  
Public Affairs, University of  
Maryland**

**If there was a product that you could offer to the marketplace that would let you live longer, be twice as happy, and have better and more frequent sex, you’d probably earn billions of dollars and end up as rich as Bill Gates. And there is such a product. That product is marriage.**

**Tom W. Smith, director,  
General Social Survey,  
National Opinion Research  
Center**

**more wealth, and have better sex lives. But that doesn't make all of the questions surrounding the institution of marriage easy to solve.**

**Ever since the Middle Ages, when canon lawyers proclaimed that marriage should be based on mutual consent between the couple rather than political arrangements between families, love has been central to our marriage tradition in the West. But if love is so important, how do we make it last? Is there one model of married love or several? And nobody, yet, has a definitive answer to the most contentious question of all—who should have the right to marry? If marriage is good for everybody, should gays and lesbians be permitted to wed?**

**Despite these lingering questions, if the past is any guide to what lies ahead we can be hopeful about the future of marriage. History teaches us that the story of marriage is not one of relentless progress or inevitable decline. It is a story of crisis and renewal, achievements and failures, things done and things left undone. It is a story whose next chapter all of us, from the very youngest to the very oldest will help to write.**

**Marriage is a big, big sacrifice. And it's worth every minute of it if you share the challenge. Sharing a life with someone. That's, I think, the greater part of it.**

**Peter, married to Christina**

**And I think that you really have to be open. Really one has to give more than the other. As far as compromise, I don't believe in compromise. Someone has to give more than the next person.**

**Christina, married to Peter**

**We need to elevate the discussion about the need for sustainable relationships. And I think we need to confront the crisis we're at. Here I think the silence of the elders is absolutely tragic. And when I say elders I mean my generation, the Baby Boom. We do a disservice just to pass on our disappointments, our losses, our cynicism. We have to ask ourselves, what do we want for our children? What are our dreams?**

**Marline Pearson, Madison Area Technical College, Madison, WI**

**Marriage, of course, is a piece of paper. But a lottery ticket is also a piece of paper. And when it has a winning number on it, that piece of paper is worth a lot. It's what the paper signifies.**

**John Witte, professor of law, Emory University School of Law**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(1) Are we moving toward greater equality and interdependence between men and women in marriages and families today? Can there be a new kind of equality that supports men and women at various points in the life cycle (pregnancy, childbirth, new parenting, career transitions)?

(2) How big of a force are the economy and the marketplace on families today and what are some of the effects? Do families have to work too hard today to achieve a middle class lifestyle? What impact does consumerism have on marriages and families today?

(3) Are there ways to affirm the model of the intact, two-parent family, while at the same time recognizing and supporting families in all their diverse forms?

(4) What have we learned about marriage and family through all our social transitions? What do we want the coming generations to know?

*For Congregations:* What can our congregation do to better support the marriages and families of its members and of society at large?

# Recommended Reading

Katherine Anderson, Don Browning, and Brian Boyer. *Marriage—Just a Piece of Paper?* (Eerdmans, 2002).

David R. Blankenhorn. *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (Harper Perennial, 1996).

Don S. Browning. *Marriage and Modernization* (Eerdmans, 2003).

Don S. Browning, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Pamela D. Couture, K. Brynolf Lyon, and Robert M. Franklin. *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Westminster/John Knox, 2000).

Maggie Gallagher. *The Age of Unwed Mothers: Is Teen Pregnancy the Problem?* (Institute for American Values, 1999).

Norval Glenn and Elizabeth Marquardt. *Hooking Up, Hanging Out, and Hoping for Mr. Right--College Women on Dating and Mating Today* (Institute for American Values 2001).

Amy A. Kass and Leon R. Kass. *Wing to Wing, Oar to Oar: Readings on Courting and Marrying* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

Dana Mack, David Blankenhorn, and Carrie Meback Mack (eds.) *The Book of Marriage: The Wisest Answers to the Toughest Questions* (Eerdmans, 2001).

Michael J. McManus. *Marriage Savers* (Zondervan, 1995).

Morehouse Conference on African American Fathers. *Turning the Corner on Father Absence in Black America* (Institute for American Values, 1999).

David Popenoe. *Life Without Father* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. *Should We Live Together?: What Young Adults Need to Know About Cohabitation Before Marriage, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (National Marriage Project, 2002).

Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher. *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (Doubleday, 2000).

Linda J. Waite et al. *Does Divorce Make People Happy?: Findings from a Study of Unhappy Marriages* (Institute for American Values, 2002).

**Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. *The Divorce Culture: Rethinking Our Commitments to Marriage and Family* (Vintage Books, 1998).**

**Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe. *Why Men Won't Commit: Exploring Young Men's Attitudes Toward Sex, Dating, and Marriage* (National Marriage Project, 2002)**

**John Witte, Jr. *From Sacrament to Contract: Religion and Law in the Western Tradition* (Westminster/John Knox, 1997).**

## **Further Resources**

**Administration for Children and Families**

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov>

This division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services works for the economic and social support of children, families, individuals, and communities. It provides information on welfare, developmental disabilities, refugees and repatriation, Native American families, child care, child support, and other policy issues.

**Americans for Divorce Reform**

<http://www.divorcereform.org/>

This organization seeks to inform the public, lawmakers, and the media about problems related to no-fault divorce. It provides information to help people get involved in state-level efforts to pass divorce reform laws and gives people the information, statistics, analysis and drafting help that they need in order to advocate divorce reform in their states.

**Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development**

<http://www.cfwf.org/>

This center began as a part of the Baltimore Healthy Start Project's Men's Services Program to engage men in the fight against infant mortality and low-birth weight babies. Ultimately, this involved providing support services that would enable fathers to become more active in the lives of their children. Through an intensive case management framework, combined with peer mentoring and support, the center addresses life skills development and the removal of barriers to parental involvement and employment to produce fathers who are positive role models in their communities and emotionally and financially supportive of their children and families.

**Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Religion**

<http://law.emory.edu/cisr>

This center brings together diverse academic perspectives to explore the influence of religious traditions on law, politics, society, and culture. In March 2003 it hosted a major conference titled, "Sex, Marriage, Family, and Religions of the Book," which brought together together and international group of scholars, government officials, and public policy leaders to address marriage and family issues from a variety of religious perspectives.

### **Center for Law and Social Policy**

<http://www.clasp.org/>

The center is a national, nonprofit organization founded to conduct research, policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on issues related to economic security for low-income families with children. It promotes a progressive agenda in family policy on a host of family policy issues, including welfare reform, workforce development, education and training, child care, child welfare, child support, reproductive health/teen parents, and couples and marriage policy. CLASP's work melds legal and policy analysis, qualitative research, and syntheses of quantitative research and best practices--building on years of experience with policy debates, program structures, legal and fiscal rules, and implementation issues. It offers a variety of services and products to federal policymakers, state and local officials and program administrators, nonprofit groups, national and state research and advocacy organizations, and the news media.

### **Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education**

<http://www.smartmarriages.com>

The Smart Marriages website is a clearinghouse for more than a hundred marriage, family and couples education courses, training, resources, and conferences. It provides a free on-line newsletter; a searchable nationwide directory of programs, associations, organizations and classes; and a variety of articles, books, cassette tapes, and other information on numerous topics related to marriage, family, and relationships. It also hosts the annual Smart Marriages conference with a variety of training institutes and workshops on marriage and family education.

### **The Dibble Fund for Marriage Education**

<http://www.buildingrelationships.org/>

This nonprofit organization is dedicated to helping young people learn skills that enable successful relationships and marriages. It serves as a nationwide advocate and resource for youth marriage education and publishes materials which help teach relationship skills, including the CONNECTIONS series for use in schools, youth groups and youth organizations.

### **First Things First**

<http://www.firstthings.org/index.html>

This community-wide initiative in Chattanooga, Tennessee, collaborates with and is supported by a broad cross-section of community organizations groups and individuals. It is dedicated to rebuilding, renewing, and revitalizing the city, beginning by strengthening families. Its primary aims are the reduction of high rates of divorce, absent fathers, and out-of-wedlock births.

### **Grand Rapids Community Marriage Policy**

<http://www.grmarriagepolicy.org/>

This local initiative in Grand Rapids, Michigan, brings together clergy and other professionals and civic leaders to promote marriage formation and marriage stability in the community through a variety of local events and programs. It includes task forces for clergy, judges, business leaders, health and mental health professionals, educators, and African American community leaders.

### **Institute for American Values**

<http://www.americanvalues.org/>

This private, nonpartisan organization is devoted to contributing intellectually to the renewal of marriage and family life and cultural sources of competence, character, and citizenship. It researches cultural and policy developments affecting the American family.

### **Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization**

<http://www.responsiblefatherhood.org/>

This organization is dedicated to empowering and supporting fathers to become actively involved in the lives of their children in a loving, nurturing, compassionate, and secure way. It seeks to create and maintain an environment in which fathers can develop the fathering and life skills they need to be the fathers their children deserve and to be supportive partners for the mothers of their children.

### **Marriage Savers**

<http://www.marriagesavers.com>

Marriage Savers is a ministry that equips local communities, principally through local congregations, to help men and women prepare for marriage, strengthen existing marriages and restore troubled marriages. So far, its “community marriage initiatives” have been established in 147 cities and towns in 37 states.

### **National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy**

<http://www.teenpregnancy.org>

This private, nonpartisan organization aims to prevent teen pregnancy. Initially stimulated by President Clinton's call in his 1995 State of the Union address for a national campaign against teen pregnancy, its task forces assess the effectiveness of programs and research, state and local actions, religion and public values, and the media.

### **National Family Life and Education Center**

<http://www.nflec.org/>

This center was conceived as an approach to positive development for "at risk" youth involved in self destructive behavior, such as drug and alcohol abuse and sales, gangs, violence, teen pregnancy, truancy, and dropping out of school. The center's mission is to work with "at risk" youth, their families, and support systems to build individual character, promote self-discipline, self-awareness, and self-sufficiency for self-determination. It helps individuals, and their families and communities, develop healthy behavior, improve study skills, make life/career plans, and increase practical knowledge about politics, economics, and social systems impacting the quality of their lives.

### **National Fatherhood Initiative**

<http://www.fatherhood.org>

Nonpartisan, non-sectarian organization dedicated to improving the well-being of children by increasing the number of committed and responsible fathers. Conducts public awareness campaigns, organizes conferences and community forums, provides resources for support programs, and disseminates information for men seeking to become more effective fathers.

### **National Marriage Project**

<http://marriage.rutgers.edu/>

The mission of this project is to strengthen the institution of marriage by providing research and analysis that informs public policy, educates the American public, and focuses attention on the problem of the decline of marriage as an institution and the consequences for children.

### **Oklahoma Marriage Initiative**

<http://www.okmarriage.org/>

The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative is a public/private partnership dedicated to reducing the state's divorce rate, strengthening families, and reducing dependence on government support. Governor Frank Keating called for a summit of state leaders to work with his Health and Human Services Cabinet Secretary to develop an action plan and engage leaders from major sectors (business, religion, government, education, media, legal, service providers, community and foundations) who since have joined forces, through this initiative, to combat the high rate of divorce in Oklahoma.

### **Religion, Culture, and Family Project**

<http://www.uchicago.edu/divinity/family>

This project--producer of the video *Marriage—Just a Piece of Paper?*, the accompanying book of the same title, and this discussion guide--has been researching issues related to marriage and family for over ten years. The project has produced a number of scholarly books on various aspects of the family, seen through the lens of religion and culture. It has also sponsored a number of conferences on marriage and family. More on the project's publication, work, and archives is available on line at the website above.

### **Ten Point Coalition**

<http://www.tenpointintl.org/>

This coalition organizes churches, church agencies, and the academic theological community to address the problems of violent youth in inner cities. It coordinates adopt-a-gang programs, trains mediators and mentors, works to develop economic alternatives to drug-dealing, and addresses domestic violence, poverty, and other issues facing women, children, and families in the communities where it works.