

CHAPTER 34

Why Families Break Down

When people marry, they usually hope that their marriage will last until they die. They certainly don't think that their relationship will sour and break down. Nevertheless, throughout the world the divorce rate is soaring. In Russia the divorce rate is about 60 percent. In Moscow it is 75 percent; this means that three of every four marriages end in divorce. Several million people divorce each year. If we are to avoid adding to these statistics, it is worth taking a look at the causes of divorce. Then we shall be more prepared for the challenges that come and hopefully will be able to overcome them.

Courtship helps to ensure that a couple are intellectually and spiritually compatible. This process usually leads people to unconsciously choose a person who is similar to themselves in many respects, usually sharing a similar educational background and coming from similar families. This makes it easier for the marriage to work, since there are fewer challenges to strain the relationship. Both partners usually will have the same expectations of running the household, of the roles in the home and of child rearing. Many conflicts can arise where opinions and values in these matters differ.

Causes of divorce

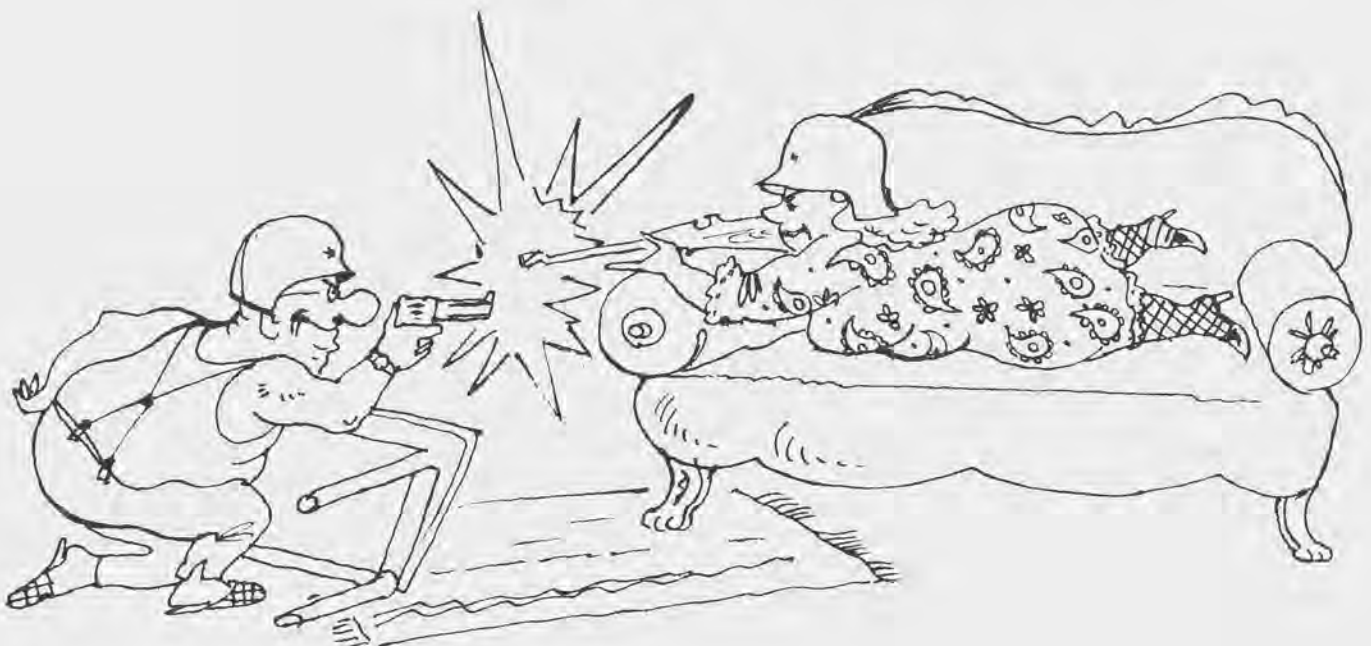
There are many pressures on marriage in modern society. Rapid social, economic and ideological changes present challenges that were unknown to earlier generations. Several general factors have contributed to this increase in divorce.

- ✘ The focus of marriage has changed. In the past, marriage was more of a social custom and institution. The family was a working unit involved in farming or business. People



generally did not marry because of love. Today marriage is more of an emotional encounter. Before marrying it's good to ask ourselves: Are we really ready to enter this world of feelings and emotions? How good are we at forming stable, mature relationships? Are we too emotional or too reserved?

- ✘ Women's widening professional opportunities have brought other challenges. A woman today often has a fulltime job. Sometimes her salary is higher than her husband's. This may weaken his self-esteem and pride. He may feel superfluous, unable to make a unique contribution to the family. A large independent income also makes it easy for women to live without a husband. In such a situation the marriage partners need to be more sensitive to each other and to try to understand each other's point of view.
- ✘ Today we have greater expectations of marriage than ever before. However, this can mean that we are easily disappointed. We must recognize that a successful marriage doesn't come ready made; it needs work.
- ✘ When a couple do things together, their relationship becomes deeper. They learn to support, help and encourage each other. During this century the state has taken over many of the functions that traditionally were performed by the family, such as education, health and welfare. Having fewer common tasks to unite them, a husband and wife can easily drift apart. To counter this, we have to become more responsible. We should not expect or allow others to do what we should do ourselves.
- ✘ Teenagers are particularly susceptible to the emotional challenges of marriage. Marriages at this age are often accompanied by stresses arising from housing, work and economic difficulties. It is worth waiting for the right time to marry. Before taking such a serious step, we need to ask ourselves whether we are mature enough to meet the challenges that marriage brings.
- ✘ Sometimes a couple meet and marry very quickly, before really knowing each other's good and bad points. Studies have shown that the success of a marriage is related to the length and quality of courtship. When a couple wait several years before marrying, they have the chance to check and recheck whether they are really suited for each other. It is worth taking the time to prepare for marriage by getting to know one's future spouse deeply.





- ✘ Drinking has destroyed countless marriages. Alcohol reduces inhibitions, and a drinker, if angry or frustrated, may verbally and physically abuse his spouse and children. Excessive drinking also can lead to economic problems when the family is left short of money. Often people drink to escape from reality. Learning the right way to go through painful experiences is a good preparation for future family life. Instead of trying to escape, we need to accept reality and deal with it with integrity. Learning not to be controlled by our physical desires is an important part of our training course.
- ✘ Divorce rates for non-religious people are higher than for those who practice their religion. How one views marriage—whether as a sacred covenant or merely a relationship—makes quite a difference. The sustained attempt to suppress religion undermined the sacred view of marriage. At the same time divorce was made easy and children were often brought up by the state. It is quite a challenge to restore the true meaning of marriage. Before you marry, find out what your future spouse thinks of the institution of marriage. Your marriage will definitely be more stable if both of you share the same understanding of marriage and its value. If your ideas differ, it's better to find it out before you marry. Then you will have a chance to reconsider your decision or will be better prepared for the difficulties that can appear in your family life.
- ✘ Surprisingly, some people marry when they are not in love, allowing themselves to be pressured into marriage. Before marrying, be sure that you truly love each other—and are not just “in love”—and that you are ready to make a commitment for life. It is better to call off an engagement, even at the last moment, if one has doubts, than to marry in haste and regret it later on.

- ✘ A challenge for many married couples is the relationship with in-laws, particularly when the newlyweds move into the parents' home. It is not easy for a wife or husband who is a stranger to join a household. It involves establishing and stabilizing emotional and practical relationships with all the in-laws. Observe your parents and grandparents, and learn how they interact with each other.
- ✘ As we grow, we change. If you marry when you are 21, you may find that your spouse is a different person at age 30. The challenge of a couple is to change and grow together as partners, facing the future together and supporting each other when difficult times come. These shared experiences enrich the marriage and make it deeper and more fulfilling. People who don't do this may feel that they have grown apart.
- ✘ When two people marry, they become a couple and have to adjust to sharing their life with another person. This takes time and effort. It means giving up some of the things one did as an individual in order to create a family. In our relationships we need to learn to balance our own desires with those of other people. Then it will be much easier to find harmony with our spouse.
- ✘ Another factor to be aware of is family finances. If one spouse is frugal but the other is a compulsive shopper and wastes money, there is bound to be conflict.
- ✘ Work too can put a strain on a marriage. If one spouse works too many hours, the couple will not have the time to relax and enjoy each other's company. Another problem may be unemployment. When a person loses a job, that person feels rejected and like a failure. He easily can feel humiliated, angry, and depressed and can become very irritable. In addition, the loss of income most likely will put a strain on the family.
- ✘ Some couples marry because the bride is pregnant. In such a situation the couple may not have discussed whether they love each other or whether they are ready for the responsibility of having a family. They may feel trapped and



see their marriage, and often the child, as some kind of punishment. This is hardly a happy beginning for a family. Statistics show that the majority of such marriages end in divorce. It's difficult to think of a better reason for keeping chastity.

- ✘ A major cause of divorce is adultery. When a couple first marry, they are excited by each other and just want to be in each other's presence. Over time the sparkle in the relationship may fade. If they are not growing in love and deepening their relationship, they can easily grow bored with each other. The relationship becomes stale and predictable. Their love grows cold. Often they will argue frequently, as the love that would make them more tolerant is missing.

At this point one may meet an attractive woman/man, and find that person stimulating and fun to be with. Friendship can turn to infatuation. The relationship is exciting and fulfilling. Sometimes this "affair" lasts only a short time or may be just a casual encounter. The spouse never finds out. However, the secret creates a barrier between the husband and wife and creates distance. It is a worm that eats away at the relationship. More serious extramarital relationships may last for years. If the betrayed spouse discovers the relationship, it can lead to divorce or, if the couple stay together, at the very least an irreparable loss of trust and closeness.

Marriage can be the source of great joy and happiness, but it is also a challenge. Before undertaking such a challenge, we should be prepared. The best preparation is to develop self-control. We must learn to manage our time and money. We must challenge ourselves so that we can control our physical desires and fulfill them at the right time and place. We must follow our conscience at all times and not give into temptation.

Furthermore, we must learn how to love others. This does not mean learning how to have sex. The key to satisfactory sex is a satisfactory relationship. Sex is important in a marriage, but most couples find that what happens *in* bed is affected by the quality of the relationship *outside* the bed – in other words, the loving relationship that a couple maintain in their daily life.

From this we can see that marriage should not be undertaken lightly. Whom you marry will be the most important decision of your life. Marriage is the most intimate relationship you will ever have. It can lead to the greatest joy, but it also can lead to misery. Preparing for marriage and its challenges is very important. Your entire life before marriage should be a preparation for marriage and becoming a parent. If you think like this, you will be far less likely to divorce and instead will find that through marriage you can grow and find deep happiness and peace.

For Your Journal



Imagine that you are about to marry. You and your future spouse decide to make a formal agreement with each other. What would you like to include in this agreement? What assurances would you like to give to your beloved?