

Mediocre marriage

*Rom 7:15-18 NIV*

*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*

### **In Defense of the Mediocre Marriage**

**I think it fair to say that all of us who are married would much prefer to have one of those rare A+, soul-mate kind of relationships. We observe a few real life couples who appear to have it all together and a few actually do. But, the movies and romance novels have made it appear that great marriages are the norm when actually, most of us struggle along with a C+ marriage.**

**Why are there so few really great marriages? Let me enumerate a few of the reasons that I most commonly see:**

1. Merging two lives is difficult and it takes much study, planning, and follow-through to do so effectively.
2. Men and women are **VERY** different. Since the Fall, we really don't "get" the opposite sex and few of us are giving it much of a try.
3. Sin has had a terrible effect on each of us. James 3:1 teaches that "we all stumble in many ways." Marriage is putting two "stumblers" under the same roof. And, eventually they conceive and raise several more "stumblers."
4. The world is a dangerous place --- it is easy to be tipped over by everything from bankruptcy to infidelity.
5. We lack good role models. Very few of us saw a marriage that really worked. Unless we connect deeply with God and His principles for living, we simply pass on the bad example to the next generation.
6. We get started on the wrong foot. We generally begin to date for selfish and superficial reasons and we fail to ask our *significant other* good questions before walking down the aisle.
7. Most of us are lousy communicators. We listen poorly, speak carelessly, and are easily offended.
8. We are way too busy with activities and stuff. Great relationships require time.

So, with all this good news, should we throw in the towel? ask for a mulligan? trade up? I think not. Pastor and Bible Scholar John McArthur has wisely stated that “God hates divorce and it should be sought only when it is the lesser of the evils and would prevent a future and even greater spiritual catastrophe.”

**Keeping a marriage together is generally better than the alternative for the following reasons:**

1. It is better for your finances (divorce is very expensive – now and in the future)
2. It is better for your kids – now and in the future. (see attached Sleeper Effect)  
Are you willing to have a stranger help raise your kids?
3. Keeping your word honors your Lord. (Ps 15:4)
4. It is better for your Christian witness and for the Kingdom of God.
5. It is better for other struggling couples. Hurting people are looking for a reason to call it quits.
6. Difficult times make you holy and “without holiness no one will see the Lord.” (Heb 12:14)
7. It may affect your rewards in Heaven.

**My recommendation for those with a C+ marriage:**

1. Hang in there!!! Lower your expectations of marriage.
2. Pray that the Lord changes both you and your spouse for the better; ask Him to raise your grade.
3. Enjoy your spouse as much as you can right now. Heaven is not that far off!

***VIP Understand that intentionality (planning), discipline (follow-through), and delayed gratification (postponing the fulfillment of one’s desires until the appropriate time), bring about success in nearly every endeavor.***

*FMN*

# The Sleeper Effect

John Leo

A startling thought is occurring to the folks who study the impact of divorce on children: A good divorce may be much worse than a bad marriage. The conventional wisdom that followed the rapid spread of divorce in the 1970s and 1980s—that children are resilient and usually overcome the shock of divorce—has been mugged by a brutal gang of facts. Some children cope well and thrive. But taken as a group, the children of divorce are at serious risk.

For a decade now, the evidence has piled up. Children of divorce are more depressed and aggressive toward parents and teachers than are youngsters from intact families. They are much more likely to develop mental and emotional disorders later in life. They start sexual activity earlier, have more children out of wedlock, are less likely to marry, and if they do marry, are more likely to divorce. They are likelier to abuse drugs, turn to crime, and commit suicide. One study shows that the children of divorce, when they grow up, are significantly less likely than adults from intact families to think they ought to help support their parents in old age. This is an indication that resentments do not fade and that the divorce boom could create disruption between generations. A report in June from the Heritage Foundation began: “American society may have erased the stigma that once accompanied divorce, but it can no longer ignore its massive effects.”

Now this discussion among researchers and policy experts is becoming part of the national conversation thanks to Judith Wallerstein and her important new book, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*. The “unexpected” part is that divorce produces “sleeper effects,” deep and long-term emotional problems that arise only when the children enter early adulthood and begin to confront issues of romance and marriage. The “powerful ghosts” of their parents’ experience rise only in later life, Wallerstein told a seminar in New York City last week.

Sense of dread. Wallerstein is a psychologist who has been studying 131 children of divorce since 1971, interviewing them intensively at different stages of life. Now these children are ages 28 through 43, and the news about them is not good. Their parents’ divorce hangs like a cloud over their lives. Compared with similar grown children from intact families in the same neighborhood, the children of divorce were more erratic and self-defeating. Some sought out unreliable partners or dull ones who at least would never leave. Others ran from conflict or avoided relationships entirely. Expecting disaster, they often worked to create it. Some grew up to achieve success in work and romance, Wallerstein says, but even they are filled with a sense of dread and foreboding that it could all collapse at any moment, like the intact home they once had.

Wallerstein’s work undercuts the notion that divorce saves children by eliminating the open conflict of parents. She finds that kids generally tune out their parents’ bitter quarrels and aren’t much bothered by them. They don’t much care whether their parents like each other or sleep in different beds. A cordial divorce doesn’t help. The children just need parents to stay together. Wallerstein says that the loss of the powerful mental image of the intact family inflicts the crucial harm. The damage is compounded by the loss of attention from frazzled parents trying to rebuild their lives.

She has her critics. Her sample is small and not necessarily representative, drawn entirely from an upscale neighborhood in Marin County, Calif. But she has reached deeper into the psyche of children of divorce over a longer period of time than any other psychologist, and her fellow researchers seem to be leaning her way. Her most strident critic, sociologist Andrew Cherlin of Johns Hopkins University, now acknowledges that divorce has significant long-term negative effects on children. David Blankenhorn, head of the Institute for American Values, calls this a sign of “the shift”—a major turnaround in thinking about divorce.

Part of the shift is the growing realization that divorce is more widespread than it needs to be. In their book, *A Generation at Risk*, researchers Paul Amato and Alan Booth report that 70 percent of American divorces are occurring in “low-conflict” marriages. In the study of some 2,000 married people, just 30 percent of divorcing spouses reported more than two serious quarrels in a month, and only 25 percent said they disagreed “often” or “very often.” So three quarters of divorcing couples don’t say they quarrel often or even disagree much.

Even bad marriages are likely to improve, according to sociologist Linda Waite of the University of Chicago. Analyzing data from the National Survey of Families and Households, Waite found that 86 percent of people who said they were in bad marriages, but who decided to stick it out, said five years later that their marriages had turned around and were now happier. Sixty percent said their marriages were “Very happy.” “Bad marriage is nowhere near as permanent a condition as we sometimes assume,” Waite says in her new book, *The Case for Marriage*. Considering what we now know about the impact of divorce on children, that should give many divorce-minded couples some second thoughts.