

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My husband and I have been married for 9 years. We have three children. For the past two or three years, our marriage has been going down hill. We try hard not to let our children know this, but I think we are headed for divorce. We love our children and want to do the best job we can in raising them. How can we maintain our good relationship with them and make this as easy as possible for everyone?

ANSWER: Firstly, your children already know something is wrong. Secondly, there is no way you can truly prepare a child for the heart damage of divorce. Thirdly, you stated you wanted to do the "best job" you could in raising them. If number three is REALLY true, then, **to believe you can do the "best job" at raising them in the absence of working hard on your marriage is like trying to make a great loaf of bread without flour.** No matter how good the rest of the ingredients are, the critical ingredient is missing. **The "best" you can do for your children is to work on, maintain, and provide them with a stable and loving marriage.**

Of course this is not easy. Of course it requires lots of work, creativity, sacrifice and placing your needs and wants under those of your children. No one has the capacity to hurt us the way our spouses can. Forgiveness within the marriage is heart wrenching, exhausting, very costly. It challenges us to place our needs underneath the needs of our spouse. Without a deep dependence on Christ, and a transforming awareness of the Cross, true forgiveness is impossible.

Although secular society wants us to believe our children can escape the trauma of divorce, research continues to show us the **life-long** detrimental effects of divorce on a person's social, emotional, psychological and spiritual makeup (see *Second Chances, A Culture of Divorce, and The Unexpected legacy of Divorce*). There is no such thing as "easy as possible" when it comes to shattering a child's world, confusing them about love, crippling their future relationships, and causing them to question the character of God. Yes, you can make things easier, but understand that we talking "**degrees of damage**", not "no damage".

Since I haven't heard talk of abuse, addiction, violence or other criminal activity, I suspect the marriage is going through what most marriages go through at some point, that is: boredom, disillusionment, selfishness, and an unwillingness to forgive. Have courage! For the sake of your children, whom you "love", find a professional who can help you to rekindle your marriage.

Finally, divorce is not like some cosmic black hole that sucks us inextricably into oblivion. With professional help, renewed commitment and good choices, you can get back on the road to a good marriage. I have counseled with hundreds of children who have been ripped apart by their parents' inability and unwillingness to forgive and work hard at their marriage. The guilt children often place on themselves, the rage they suppress, and the loneliness and fear they endure are preventable. The road back will be slow and "up hill", but well worth it. Believe me, I know this is not easy to hear. In our self-absorbed culture, where people love to roll around in their own hurts and wants, it is even less easy to do. **"With God, all things are possible!"**

Yes, God does allow divorce. But he does so with deep sadness and for very serious reasons. Even with serious reasons, no one must divorce. Forgiveness and reconciliation are always a possibility. Yes, sometimes only one party is interested and divorce is chosen by the other. I challenge you to be the one who works hard on the marriage, tries everything and seeks God constantly. Before I would give advice on how to ease some of the effect of divorce, I would need to know the couple has worked hard at every other option, and all of those other options are unworkable.

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