

Lecture#9
Separation and Divorce:
Implications for Christian Counseling

Instructor:
Thomas Idiculla, PhD;

www.agapepartners.org/coaching

Outline

- Separation and Divorce: Definitions
- Divorce Trends
- Causes of divorce
- What the Bible says about divorce
- Implications for Counseling
- Consequences of divorce
- Couples' Responses to Separation and Divorce
- Discussion

Separation

- Separation is when a married couple decides to live apart as single persons.
- While separated, some couples seek counseling for restoration, while others begin seeking new relationships.
- 75-80% of those who separate never come back to the relationship.

Divorce

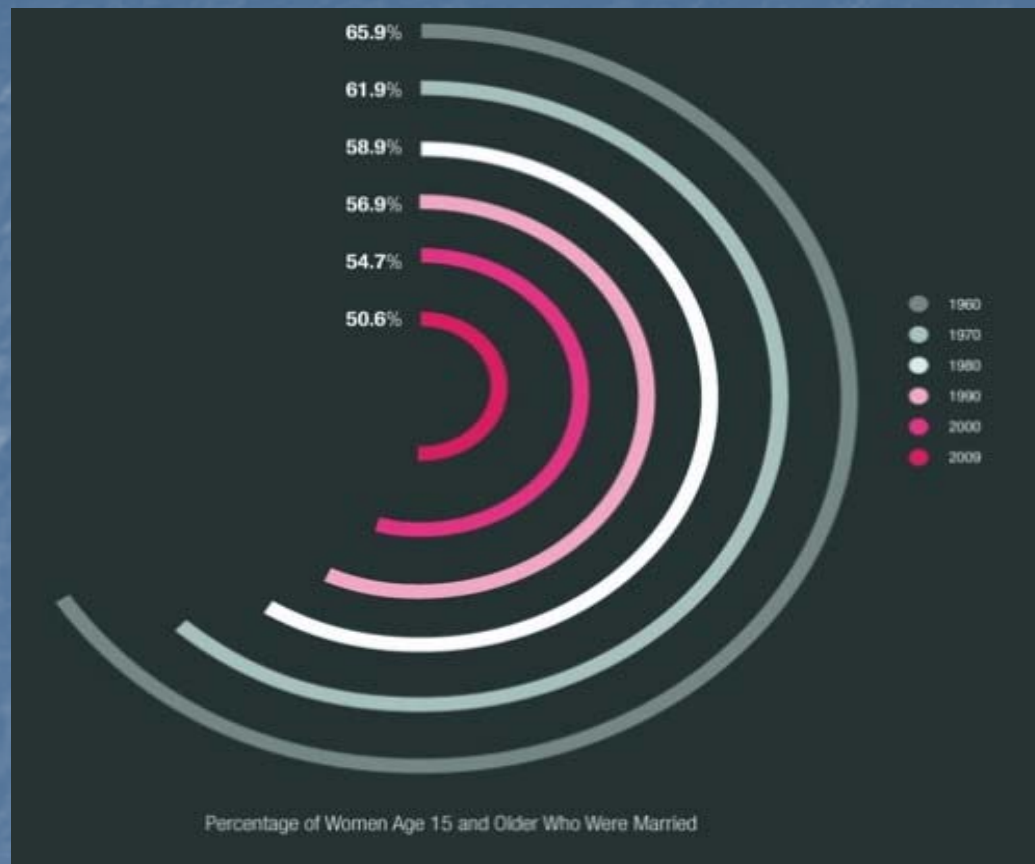
- Divorce or the dissolution of marriage is the final termination of a marital union, cancelling all legal duties of the marriage and once and for all dissolving the bonds of matrimony between two individuals.
- Divorce is a death in every sense of the word: the death of a marriage, a family, and a dream.
- No one, especially a Christian, enters marriage expecting the marriage to end in divorce.

Trends in Marriage, Divorce, and Cohabitation (USA)*

- Since 1970 marriages have declined 30%.
- Since 1970 divorces have increased 40%.
- Women are the first to file for divorce 65% of the time.
- Over 40% of first marriages end within 13 years.
- Over 20% of first marriages end within 5 years.
- Over 75% of divorced people get remarried.
- Second marriages fail 65% of the time.
- Premarital cohabitation increased 70% in the 1990's.
- Over 50% of premarital cohabitating couples split up within 5 years.
- Over 50% of marriages are preceded by premarital cohabitation

*Trends in Marriage, Divorce, and Cohabitation based on data from the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia.

Trends in Marriage: 1960 to 2010 (USA)



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Marriage Trends: United States, 2000-2010

Year	Marriages	Population	Rate per 1,000 total population
2010	2,096,000	308,745,538	6.8
2009	2,080,000	306,771,529	6.8
2008	2,157,000	304,093,966	7.1
2007	2,197,000	301,231,207	7.3
2006 ¹	2,193,000	294,077,247	7.5
2005	2,249,000	295,516,599	7.6
2004	2,279,000	292,805,298	7.8
2003	2,245,000	290,107,933	7.7
2002	2,290,000	287,625,193	8.0
2001	2,326,000	284,968,955	8.2
2000	2,315,000	281,421,906	8.2

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Divorce Trends: United States, 2000-2010

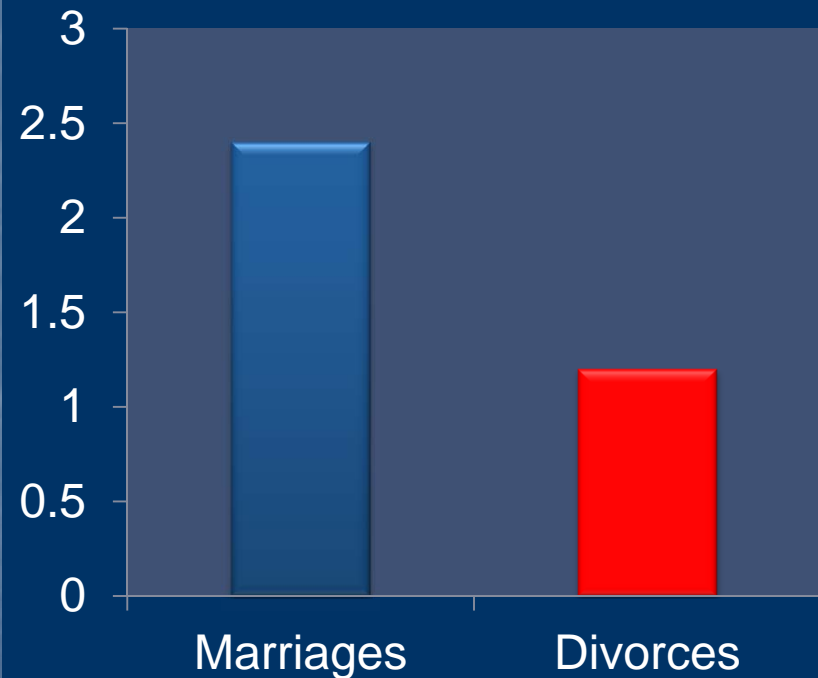
Year	Divorces	Population	Rate per 1,000 total population
2010 ¹	872,000	244,122,529	3.6
2009 ¹	840,000	242,610,561	3.5
2008 ¹	844,000	240,545,163	3.5
2007 ¹	856,000	238,352,850	3.6
2006 ¹	872,000	236,094,277	3.7
2005 ¹	847,000	233,495,163	3.6
2004 ²	879,000	236,402,656	3.7
2003 ³	927,000	243,902,090	3.8
2002 ⁴	955,000	243,108,303	3.9
2001 ⁵	940,000	236,416,762	4.0
2000 ⁵	944,000	233,550,143	4.0

¹Trends in Marriage, Divorce, and Cohabitation based on data from the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia.

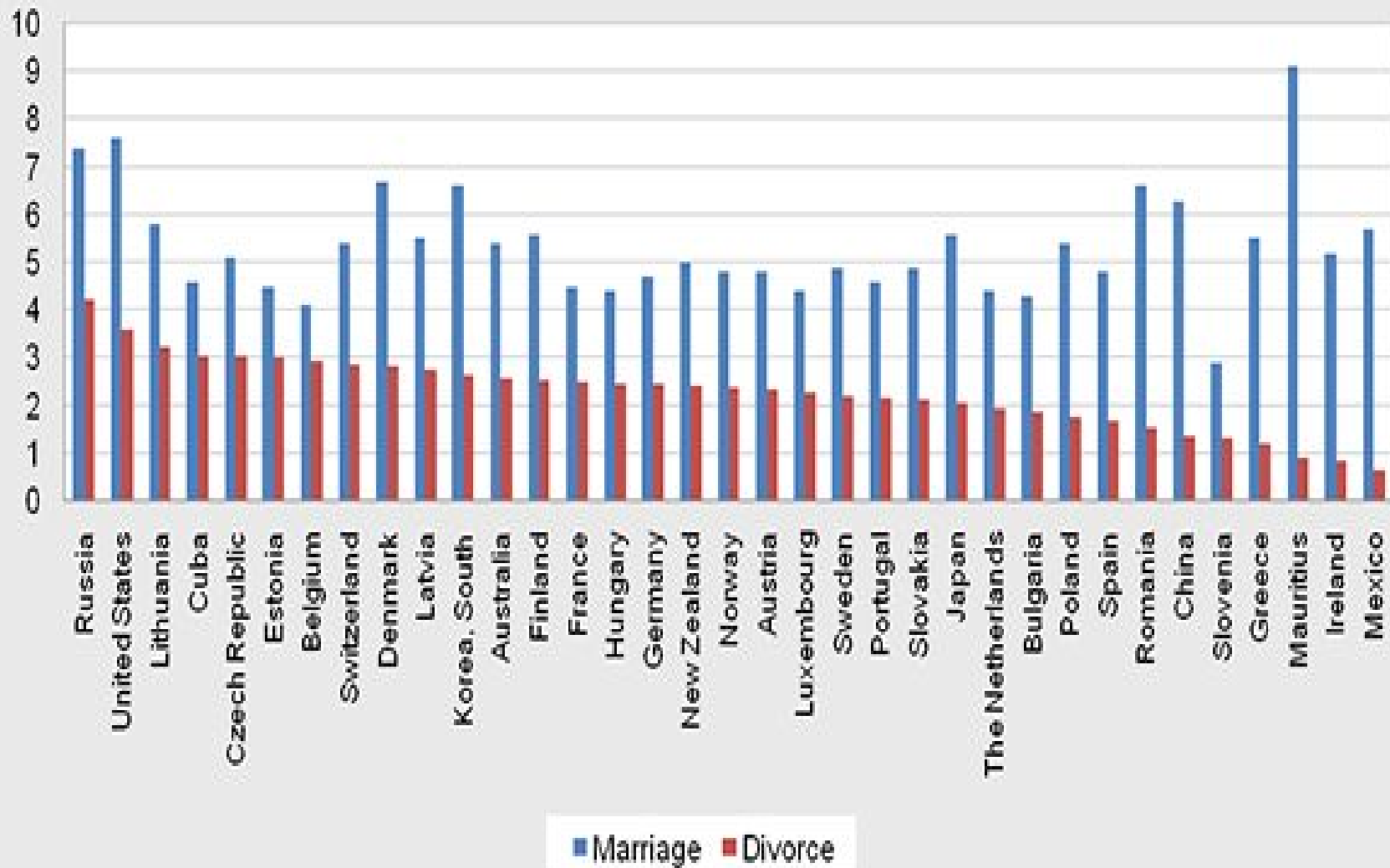
Half of All Marriages End in Divorce? True or False

- Average number of marriages in US/year=2.4 million
- Average number of divorces in US/year=1.2 million

Marriage and Divorce Trends (in Millions)



Marriage and Divorce Rates per 1000 Population



Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris, France

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Top 10 Reasons Marriages Fail (*Secular Survey*)

1. Financial Problems
2. Communications Problems (failure in communication, Verbal abuse, mistrust)
3. Family Problems
4. Sex Problems/ perceived lack of love/ Extramarital affairs
5. Friend Problems
6. Addiction Problems
7. Abuse Problems/ Spouse or Child abuse
8. Personality Problems/Anxiety, depression and personal issues
9. Expectation Problems/Unfulfilled expectations/ Dissatisfaction
10. Time Problems

Consequences of divorce

1. Spiritual torment (Malachi 2:16)
2. Unforgiveness and bitterness.
3. Children torn between parents.
4. The emotional abyss.
5. Lost Wealth. (Malachi 3:11).

Consequences of divorce

- Children feel that their childhood has been lost forever.
- Divorce is a price they pay as forfeiture to their parents' failures, jeopardizing their future lives.
- —Dr. Judith Wallerstein

Professor Stanley at the University of Denver suggests that people consider the following statements:

- People who have been married for many years (over 30 years) and have never been divorced have almost no chance of the marriage ending in divorce.
- A young couple marrying for the first time today has a lifetime divorce risk of 40 percent, "unless current trends change significantly."

What the Bible says about divorce

- **Divine hatred for divorce (Malachi 2:16).**
 - God hates the spirit behind divorce because of the damage it causes
 - It is considered a sin because it ruins lives
- **Divine hope for the divorced (1 John 1:8-10).**
 - Romans 12:15 says that we should “weep with those who weep.” People recovering from the trauma of a broken marriage need the church to:
 - Share in their sorrow and offer compassion
 - Give reassurance that their church family will not reject them
 - Impart hope that God will somehow bring good out of this
 - Offer opportunities to serve in the church

What about the “exception clause”?

- Biblical Exceptions for Divorce (Mathew 5:32 and 19:9)
 - “Marital unfaithfulness” (NIV), “fornication” (KJV)
 - Sexual activity outside the marital covenant breaks the marriage vow.
 - In Matthew 19:9, Jesus said that if a spouse has committed this type of sin, the other spouse is free to divorce.
 - This does not mean divorce is required in instances where sexual sin has been committed, but it is permitted.
- Physical abuse is not addressed in the Bible as a reason for divorce
 - No where does Scripture command a woman to stay in a home where she or her children are being physically abused.
 - Separation is necessary for physical safety.

Assessment Interview

- For Couples Contemplating Divorce
- When a couple comes to counseling with divorce as an option, you are usually the last stop before a lawyer.
- You may want to meet with the couple together first and then with permission meet with each one separately for a session.

Helping a Friend or Family Member Through Divorce: Counseling Ministry

- Don't try to figure out who is the "Good Guy" and who is the "Bad Guy."
- Express your concern, just as you would about any other life event.
- Call or write periodically.
- Continue to include the person in social gatherings, but don't invite both partners to the same event.
- Offer to go with the person to an attorney.
- Listen, listen, listen!

A True Story

My husband suddenly announced one day that he is leaving our family for another woman. However, he did not file for divorce immediately, not until two years after. I took that as a sign that he himself is debating whether to come back, that he did not want to officially end our marriage yet. When my ex-husband first told me he was leaving, I thought about my choices. I could either lose everything, or hold on to something that I could. I was losing my husband, but I didn't have to lose my faith in God altogether with him. So I decided to hold on to my faith. What I was going through felt like I was being soaked in rain, and I needed an umbrella, a spiritual umbrella, to keep me from being more wet. From that day on, I never missed one single Sunday. Looking back, I see that my faith has grown and matured a lot.

Helping a Couple Through Separation: Counseling Ministry

- Refer professional help.
- Help them to join a support group.
- Refer to an attorney (after assessment).
- Tell them how you can help
- Tell friends and family how they can help.
- Be kind to them.
- Understand each person's journey is unique.

Reactions to the stress of separation

ACTIVE BLEEDING (2 months - 1 year duration)

- Feel on the verge of tears a good deal of the time
- See couples or families make them want to go home and cry
- Sundays or dinner time make them particularly blue
- Getting angry with someone who has a happy marriage
- Feel like a failure
- Thinking, "If only I'd done ---, my marriage would have lasted"
- Feel ashamed about the break-up
- Not wanting to talk to people
- Stay home because they feel they can't face the world

Reactions to the stress of separation

EUPHORIA-2 months duration

- Feel like everything is rosy
- Feel that things that used to bother you don't
- Walk around with a perpetual smile on their face
- Experience a feeling similar to the one experienced when they were first in love
- Feel like it's the best season of the year
- Feel that they don't have any problems
- Feeling that things will work out—someday, somehow
- Feel they don't want to discuss their problems
- Feel like they are on a high
- When Pastors or Counselors talk to them they often feel they are being overly concerned, overly cautious, overly pessimistic

Divorce-proofing the home.

Alert to situations that can lead to the fracturing of a marriage.

- Factors: another person, lust, any number of fleshly sins, pride, jealousy, hostility, uncontrolled temper and so on.
- The same spiritual disciplines that keep the individual soul safe also apply to the marriage and family.
- Living close to God keeps the heart away from the fringes where the enemy lurks and attacks.
- David would never have seen Bathsheba bathing had he been where he was supposed to be “at war against the enemy” (2 Samuel 11:1,2).

Action Steps: For Couples Contemplating Divorce

- Empathize with the pain and hurt both spouses are going through.
- Share what the Bible says about divorce (eg: God hates divorce)
- Forgiveness and restoration are also an option
- Put the Divorce on Hold: (eg: prayer, seek counseling)
- Stop the Pain (eg: explore the issues in their relationship, Reduce negative interactions)
- Have the couple seek grace, forgiveness and mercy from God and each other.

Summary

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- Couples' Responses to Separation and Divorce

Resources

- Leonard, K. (2005). *Divorce Care: Hope, Help and Healing During and After Your Divorce*, Thomas Nelson
- Bob Burns, B.; Whiteman, T. (1998) *Fresh Start Divorce Recovery Workbook, Revised Updated*, *Thomas*
- Clinton T, Trent T. (2009), *The Quick-Reference Guide to Marriage and Family Counseling*, Baker Books
- Dobson, J (2012) *Handbook of Family Advice: Encouragement and Practical Help for Your Home*, Harvest House Publishers

CONTACT INFORMATION

- Agape Partners International
P.O. Box 550141
Waltham, MA 02452
- Phone: **781-330-0569** | **516-855-8093**
Email: counsel@agapepartners.org
Web: www.agapepartners.org
- Technical Support: support@agapepartners.org
- **717-546-4144**