

A Conversation About Marriage

Written by Armstrong Williams

The single most overlooked reason why America struggles is simple: Divorce. Nearly 60 percent of marriages end in divorce and most of the social problems in our country can be traced back to this embarrassing fact. It may sound radical or even naïve to blame our social problems on divorce, but until we start thinking of marriage as *that* important, our country will never reach its potential.

Currently our culture is explicitly concerned with the war, education, health care, terrorism, and the economy. And rightfully so. All of these things are critical to the success of our nation and to each of us. However they are not the most important issues facing our country today. Marriage is. A strong marriage creates a strong household. A strong household produces strong children. Strong children produce a strong society. It's a cyclical affect that has been forgotten and ignored in the last 50 years. Until our leaders start fighting for marriage in Congress, our churches start focusing on marriage in their temples, and each of us start laboring for our marriage in our households, our country will continue to fall short.

The couple, children, and society benefit from a strong marriage. When in a committed, loving, and monogamous relationship we feel complete. A loving spouse picks up where we leave off, makes up for our deficiencies, and brings out the very best in us. Children also feel more complete when their parents are happy together. Getting love and support from both parents enables children to grow up educated, confident, loving, productive, and principled. Society benefits because a strong marriage produces children who are generally become productive members of society. The advantages of a strong marriage and two parent household are literally limitless, and sadly the disadvantages of divorce and single parent households are just as limitless.

Single parent households hurt the adults, children, and society. The adults must work more hours to recoup lost income. One parent is expected to handle most, if not all, of the parenting. Each adult often feels alone, lost, depressed, and confused after losing their spouse. The children have one less person helping, nurturing, and loving them on a daily basis. They have a harder time understanding what a



committed relationship entails because they miss out on seeing their parents in love. Society suffers because children who grow up in single parent households are more likely to be raised by grandparents or daycare volunteers which can retard development. These children tend to grow up with less confidence and security, and arguments have been made that they are slower to mature, learn, and produce positive results. Yes many parents who run a single parent home have done wonderful, admirable jobs raising their children by themselves, but they shouldn't have to. And likewise, many children who grew up in single parent homes have gone on to live healthy, happy, and productive lives, but they shouldn't have to either.

The church (and faith based organizations) is perhaps the most equipped institution for supporting marriages. Most churches encourage engaged couples to attend pre-marriage counseling before taking the plunge. This is a positive first step, but more should be done. Marriage ministries should become the norm at every church, and every married couple should be expected to attend, participate, and contribute to these ministries to some degree. Post-marriage counseling between the church and couple should occur on a regular basis and *before* problems arise. Couples should be expected to attend church services and functions regularly, and live by the standards set forth by the church. God made marriage for men and women who wanted to commit to a lifetime together, and churches must actively increase their support for engaged and married members.

Local, state, and federal governments should also take part in making marriage more successful. Simply put, our courts and governments need to make it more difficult to get married. Couples should be required by law to be engaged for at least one year prior to getting married. During that year they should be required to regularly attend pre-marriage counseling. After they marry, couples should be required to attend annual counseling or classes to keep their marriage license updated. Furthermore, getting a divorce should be more difficult. Unless there is a case of abuse, infidelity, or neglect, couples should be required to attend counseling before undergoing divorce proceedings. Officials must realize that providing leadership and resources to support marriage now will save our society money and heartache later.

More than the church and state, it is up to each of us to ensure that marriage succeeds. We must resist the urge to jump into marriage or be lulled in merely by material possessions, looks, or status. We need to look deeper into our partner's hearts and minds and really understand and know them before committing to a life with them. We must prepare for difficult times during the marriage and expect to work through these problems. Marriage is not easy, and each of us must understand that it is a two-way-street





and takes consistent work to endure. And finally, we need to love God and love ourselves before we can love or be loved by another.

A strong marriage makes for strong children, which makes for a strong society. Marriage is more important than any institution in the world - more important than public schools, healthcare, or the military. It is perhaps the most important aspect of our society and without a doubt, it is now failing. We need to take a long, hard look at practical and creative ways to fix the problem. And we need to take a long, hard look at ourselves to see how each of us can again make the institution of marriage the cornerstone of our country.

Armstrong Williams "The Right Side" 2006

