

Remarrying - The Quest Continues

Jeff Parziale Ph.D., M, Div.

Americans are enamored with marriage-especially getting married. Nearly three-quarters of us marry by our 35th birthday. And when we fail, we do not give up. As many as half of all marriages end in divorce, but three out of four of those divorced people will marry again, typically within two years-or less!! Four out of ten marriages today involve at least one partner who has been married before.

Researchers are only slowly coming to understand the dynamics of remarriage and what it means in our society. We have a culture exploding with stepfamilies. In fact, nearly half of all American alive today will be involved at some level in a stepfamily.

What draws so many to remarry after the pain of a divorce; especially when the statistics on remarriage are so abysmal? Some believe there is a basic human longing that drives people to marry again. To be sure, partners who have been married more than once face daunting odds: the failure rate for second marriages is over sixty percent. Yet most remarry with great optimism. "This time it will work." "I won't make the same mistakes this time." Many seem to subscribe to the conventional wisdom of our culture: "Things will be different this time, I am a little bit older and whole lot wiser."

Marrying couples say they will stay that way for life; apparently a rather common conviction. Even the vast majority of Americans (81 percent) who have been divorced or separated say they believe marriage should be for life.

Nevertheless, the reality is that more than half of second marriages break up within ten years. Some researchers speculate that it may be that once a person goes through divorce, it is easier to divorce again. The fear of the unknown is removed. We know that the level of family and community support is generally lower in remarriages.

Couples often enter remarriage with a mythical sense of security that they will not make the "same" mistakes again. Unfortunately, they often make a myriad of "new" mistakes. Some, for example, gravitate toward people who are similar to their previous spouses. Most "rush" into remarriage long before they are ready. Few remarrying couples truly understand why their last relationship failed.

Americans are enamored with getting married, but we need to put the same passion into staying married. The reality is that marriage is actually harder the second time around, and burdened with pressures that the first marriage did not have. Juggling the needs of a new marriage, for example, along with the needs of children can be tough. Remarrying couples bring baggage (hurts, unresolved issues, etc.) into the new relationship. Stepparents and stepchildren have

difficulty connecting, placing a great deal of pressure on the biological parent and consequently on the marriage. So, let's celebrate marriage and remarriage. I urge you to put far more thought and planning into your new marriage than into your wedding. Have four to six pre-marital counseling sessions, more if you are remarrying with children. Live and love well. ***Dr. Jeff Parziale is the Director of InStep Ministries, which provides resources, counsel and support to singles, single parents and remarried individuals and their families.***