

Children of Divorce

✖ Dr Judith Wallerstein is a respected psychologist known for her research on the long-term effects of divorce. Her book, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25-Year Landmark Study*, has created a media stir. Divorce, she confirms, is not an event children quickly get over. In fact, the effects of divorce on children are profound and cumulative.

In her study, Wallerstein followed 130 children from 60 middle-class families in northern California for 25 years. Her findings are depressing when it comes to how children of divorce fare. These now adult children tend to have lower-paying jobs and fewer years of college than their parents; unstable father-child relationships; a history of vulnerability to drugs and alcohol in adolescence; fears about commitment and divorce; and negative memories of the legal system that forced custody and visitation.

But the most distressing finding was that children of divorce do not get better with time. Instead they develop problems that tend to peak when they are in their 20s and 30s. Wallerstein and co-authors Julie Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee report that because, as children, they lacked healthy models for marriage, they often have problems with commitment and intimacy as adults.

Children, it appears, have very different experiences with divorce than their divorcing parents. While the latter go through periods of high conflict and emotional pain, they tend to heal within three years of the experience. Unfortunately, the effects of divorce on children linger for life.

Many Christians have applauded the results of Wallerstein's longitudinal study, feeling it supports the need for a lifelong marital covenant. However, not everyone in the body of Christ is rejoicing. In fact, one group of believers feels

more weighed down than ever.

When the divorce findings were released, I took a summary copy to a Christian divorce-support group I was facilitating. The group members' reactions bordered on hostile.

I heard comments such as: "I don't want to hear the research findings. It's like hammering another nail in the coffin." "How many times do we have to be told divorce hurts children? The church already does a great job reminding us of that!" "I know divorce has negative consequences. I live with them every day."

The groups' message was, "Stop telling us how bad divorce is." They were tired of being judged or seen as failures. What they wanted was hope.

So here was my suggestion to them. Don't ignore the findings because you feel judged by them. Be informed of the possible ramifications in order to know how to pray.

Do this: List out the possible consequences of divorce from the research. Then take each one and pray over the related part of your child's life.

For example, take the finding that says children of divorce have difficulty with love and commitment later in life. Pray specifically about this. Ask God to break that pattern in your child's life.

Strengthen your relationship with Him so that your child sees a healthy model of love and commitment to a heavenly Father. Trust God to do as He promised—restore what was stolen.

Children don't have to repeat negative family patterns if you identify them early and begin to make changes. Here is a simple way to pray:

"Lord, I break dysfunction (mention the specific difficulty) over my child now. The enemy is under my feet, and I'm telling

him to take his hands off my child.

“Lead this child into the knowledge of Your love. Help him or her experience it in such a way that there will never be doubt about the power of love.

“Help me be obedient in my covenant with You that I may be blessed. Let the intimate relationship I have with You as my Savior be the one that impresses and molds my child.”

If you feel hopeless about the divorce research, take heart. God can take what’s probable, according to the research, and render it impossible.

But you must know what you are up against in order to fight back with prayer. Use the findings to specifically target intercession for your children—and watch God’s transforming power restore them to wholeness.