

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE?

A Summary of Some of the Findings in the Book: *Second Chances: Men, Women, & Children a Decade After Divorce* by Judith S. Wallerstein & Sandra Blakeslee (New York: Ticknor & Fields [Houghton Mifflin], 1989)

Wayne Grudem, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Deerfield, Illinois

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I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper I have given a summary, largely in the form of direct quotations, of many of the findings reported in the book *Second Chances*. The book reports the results of the most thorough long-term study of divorce that has ever been undertaken. Dr. Wallerstein and her colleagues interviewed 60 families (120 parents with 131 children) who were going through a divorce in 1971 (p. x). They then interviewed the same people at intervals of one year, five years, and ten years after the divorce, in order to ascertain the results of the divorces on people's lives. (Follow up interviews were also conducted at 15 years after the divorces.) No other study of this magnitude has ever been done on the long term consequences of divorce.

A. The Author:

Judith Wallerstein, Ph.D., is the founder and executive director of the Center for the Family in Transition in Corte Madera, California. This center counsels more divorcing families than any other agency in America.

B. The Families Studied:

The researchers chose a homogenous population group for their study, one in which the couples and their children "seemed to be doing well or reasonably well" prior to the divorce and therefore they "were representative of the way normal people from a white, middle-class background cope with divorce" (p. xiv). About 1/4 of the men in the study are doctors, lawyers, or top management executives; most of the rest are in white collar positions or owners of small businesses. 75% of the women have had at least some college education. Half of the families belonged to churches or synagogues. Almost all were raised in traditional, intact families with middle class values. For almost all families, this was the first divorce on either side of the family (p. xiv). At the time of the writing of the book in 1989 not one of the adults in the study was on welfare (p. xiv). In the words of Dr. Wallerstein, "This, then, is divorce under the best of circumstances" (p. xv).

C. The term "divorce" in this study:

Wallerstein explains that in this study, "The word *divorce* is used to mean the point in time when a husband and wife no longer live together and one of them has filed for divorce. The legal divorce typically follows at least a year later" (p. 319).

D. Negative Consequences Emphasized in this Summary:

The overall theme of the book is that divorce has surprisingly harmful long-term consequences on many or most of the people affected by it, especially the children. These harmful consequences are what I have focused on in this summary. To be fair to the book I must also note that there are some people who consider themselves better off after the divorce. For them divorce has seemed to be the best solution to a bad situation. Wallerstein reports on these people as well, but they constitute a minority of the adults and almost none of the children.

My purpose in this summary, however, is to give a statistical summary of the harmful effects of divorce, in order to allow those who might be thinking about divorce to realize ahead of time what the probable consequences will be.

E. One-year Results Contrary to Expectations:

Wallerstein explains that when they began the study they expected that divorce would be a short-term crisis that people soon recovered from:

The study was supposed to last one year, for we believed that normal healthy people would be able to work out their problems following divorce in about one year's time....Indeed we did not question the commonly held assumption that divorce was a short-lived crisis.

But when we conducted follow-up interviews one year to 18 months later, we found most families still in crisis. Their wounds were wide open. Turmoil and distress had not noticeably subsided. Many adults still felt angry, humiliated, and rejected, and most had not gotten their lives back together. An unexpectedly large number of children were on a downward course. Their symptoms were worse than before. Their behavior at school was worse. Their peer relationships were worse. Our findings were absolutely contradictory to our expectations (p. xv).

F. Five-year results still troubling

At the end of five years the researchers interviewed the families again:

...We were deeply concerned about a large number of youngsters - well over 1/3 of the whole group - who were significantly worse off than before. Clinically depressed, they were not doing well in school or with friends. They had deteriorated to the point that

some early disturbances, such as sleep problems, poor learning, or acting out, had become chronic.

We also found, in this five year follow-up, that the majority of children still hoped that their parents would reconcile....Even if there had been a remarriage, they held on to reconciliation fantasies based on the logic that "If they can get divorced once, they can do it again." After the first five years they were also intensely angry at their parents for giving priority to adult needs rather than to their needs. Few children were truly sympathetic or really understood why their parents divorced, even when the parents thought it was obvious (p. ____).

Because these five-year results were so troubling, the researchers decided to do another follow-up study at the end of ten years, and then they did another one after fifteen years. This book was written mostly on the basis of the ten-year results, because the fifteen-year interviews had been conducted but the results had not been fully tabulated and analyzed.

Therefore the remainder of this summary consists of quotations from the book, mostly telling the results of the ten-year interviews.

II. THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON PARENTS

A. The Stress of Being a Single Parent:

Men and women tell us very clearly at the ten-year mark that the stress of being a single parent never lightens and that the fear of being alone never ceases. Because single parents are financially strapped, they have less leeway when emergencies strike, no back up for illness, crisis, or loss. They have fewer resources to help solve a problem (p. 10).

B. The Persistence of Anger:

Incredibly, one-half of the women and one-third of the men are still intensely angry at their former spouses despite the passage of ten years. Because their feelings have not changed, anger has become an ongoing, and sometimes dominant presence in their children's lives as well.

...A third of the women and a quarter of the men, mostly the older ones, feel that life is unfair, disappointing, and lonely. It is sobering to see how unhappy they are at this stage (p. 29).

C. Continuing Pain:

...There is no evidence that time automatically diminishes feelings or memories; that hurt and depression are overcome; or that jealousy, anger, and outrage will vanish. Some ex-

periences are just as painful ten years later; some memories haunt us for a lifetime. People go on living, but just because they have lived ten more years does not mean they have recovered from the hurt (p. 30).

D. Probability of Remarriage:

At the ten year mark, less than 1/3 of the men now over fifty and ½ of those now in their forties continued to be happily remarried (p. 42).

What is the likelihood that both husband and wife will remarry and have stable marriages?

In only one in seven of the former couples did the former wife and husband experience stable second marriages (p. 41).

E. Results for Men Over 40 Who Do Not Remarry:

Although Wallerstein reports on some men who do not remarry but maintain successful careers in the years following divorce, she says that they find themselves increasingly isolated socially, and often intensely unhappy:

Half of the older men in our study, those over 40 at separation, did not remarry in the decade after divorce, and in our follow-up interviews they paint a picture of intense isolation and deprivation (p. 43).

(The narrative on pages 43 - 45 indicates how difficult it is for divorced men who are over 40 and who do not remarry, to have any kind of social network at all in our society.)

F. Remarriage Unlikely for Women over 40

Age is a crucial factor for women who divorce. In our study, every woman who was 40 or older at marital separation remained unmarried ten years later...Not one had a stable love relationship at the ten-year mark. By contrast, half of their former husbands were remarried at the ten-year mark...

I was really taken aback when I found how much our figures vary from national estimates, which hold that 75% of divorced women and 80% of divorced men remarry. Could our study be so far off the mark? I asked Dr. Arthur Norton, assistant chief demographer of the United States. He thought not. Few people, he said, realize how such population figures are derived. For example, the census figures are averages that include many 18-, 19- and 20-year old women who tend to remarry readily after divorce. Older women who have been married 10 or 20 years encounter very different odds (p. 49).

The text goes on to explain that the national statistic is that of all women who divorce, only 11% remarry in their 40s, and only 3% remarry in their 50s.

G. Financial and Social Consequences for Women

Ten years after divorce, the older women stand out from other groups in our study. With one or two major exceptions, they undergo much less psychological change, explore fewer second chances, and have less sense of pride or accomplishment than their younger counterparts....80% are insecure financially....

These women find support in friends, clubs, and churches...even though they are not isolated socially, they are intensely lonely. In comparing their lives today with their married years, they express a terrible feeling of loss. These women loved and cherished the roles of wife, mother, homemaker, and nurturer. They laid out the holiday decorations, cooked the traditional feasts, and passed the carving knife to the man of the house. Since the divorce, they still put out the decorations and cook the feasts for the children. But it is not the same....they miss the warmth of traditional family life.

Ten and fifteen years of heading a household does not erase the sense of loss these older women feel or their anxiety about living alone. Older single women in our society are indeed more vulnerable and have reason to be fearful of their future alone....Half of the women in our study who did not remarry report a deteriorating sense of physical well-being as they cope with the many problems that arise in the decade after divorce. They have more bodily complaints, including colds, headaches, backaches, constipation, migraines, colitis, high blood pressure, and jaw pain. Indeed, these complaints are not confined to older women but are widely reported by single, divorced women. (Remarried women do not report a wide range of somatic symptoms). Others have psychological problems but cannot afford therapy. Many, it seems, lay their hands on a refillable Valium prescription in lieu of the treatment they need.

Some men and women seem to be held together by marriage; it brings order and security to their lives, and the structure itself provides their *raison d'etre* and their highest level of adult adjustment. For both men and women, marriage in middle or later life has an additional and very important function: it provides an internal buffer against the anxieties of aging, of being old and alone, and of facing the inevitability of death. It also provides external supports to cope with the increasing disabilities and infirmities of old age. When the structure is removed, they are left feeling extremely vulnerable, and the external symptoms of physical deterioration are symbolic of internal conflict and emotional distress (pp. 50-53).

H. The Importance of Community Pressure to Maintain Marriages

Wallerstein reports an interesting conversation with anthropologist Margaret Mead. In a 1972 conversation over the early findings of Wallerstein's studies, Mead said to her, "Judy, there is no society in the world where people have stayed married without enormous community pressure to do so. And I don't think anybody can predict what you will find" (p. 297).

Wallerstein continues by expressing concern at the kind of world we have created in the last 20 years - "*A world in which marriage is freely terminable at any time, for the first time in our history*" (p. 297).

I. Is Divorce Becoming Easier Because it is More Common?

Wallerstein explains that our society has an unprecedented number of parents and children who have gone through divorce, but that does not seem to make it any easier:

The causes of divorce have not changed, nor have men's and women's feelings changed. The amount of suffering is no less. People like to think that because there are so many divorced families, adults and children will find divorce easier or even easy. But neither parents nor children find comfort in numbers. Divorce is not a more "normal" experience simply because so many people have been touched by it. Our findings revealed that all children suffer from divorce, no matter how many of their friends have gone through it. And although the stigma of divorce has been enormously reduced in recent years, the pain that each child feels is not assuaged. Each and every child cries out, "Why me?" (p. 303).

III. THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

A. Effects on children in general

1. Loss of family structure:

Wallerstein explains that a fundamental loss of a sense of family structure brings a significant threat to children's normal development:

Divorce is a different experience for children and adults because the children lose something that is fundamental to their development - the family structure. The family comprises the scaffolding upon which children mount successive developmental stages, from infancy into adolescence. It supports their psychological, physical, and emotional ascent into maturity. When that structure collapses the children's world is temporarily without supports. And children, with a vastly compressed sense of time, do not know that the chaos is temporary. What they do know is that they are dependent on the family. Whatever its shortcomings, children perceive the family as the entity that provides the support and protection that they need. With divorce, that structure breaks down, leaving children who feel alone and very frightened about the present and the future (pp. 11-12)

2. Rejection:

In addition, Wallerstein explains that children of divorce regularly feel rejected by their parents:

Children of all ages feel intensely rejected when their parents divorce. When one parent leaves the other, the children interpret the act as including them. "He left Mom. He doesn't care about me." Or "She left Dad. I must not be what she wanted."

Children get angry at their parents for violating the unwritten rules of parenthood - parents are supposed to make sacrifices for children, not the other way around. Some keep their anger hidden for years out of fear of upsetting parents or for fear of retribution and punishment; others show it (p. 12).

3. Children's Feelings

Children feel intense loneliness. It amazes me how little support they get at this time, even from grandparents. Divorce is an acute, painful, long-remembered experience that children must often negotiate with the sense that they are alone in the world....A child will remember for many years the neighbor down the block who was kind during the divorce. In our study, fewer than 10% of the children had any adult speak to them sympathetically as the divorce unfolded (p. 13).

Even when children are encouraged not to take sides, they often feel that they must. However, when they do take sides to feel more protected, they also feel despair because they are betraying one parent over the other. If they do not take sides, they feel isolated and disloyal to both parents. There is no solution to their dilemma (p. 13).

Many children feel guilty, and some feel that it is their duty to mend the marriage...

The devastation children feel at divorce is similar to the way they feel when a parent dies suddenly, for each experience disrupts close family relationships. Each weakens the protection of the family; each begins with an acute crisis followed by disequilibrium that may last several years or longer; and each introduces a chain of long-lasting changes that are not predictable at the outset. But divorce may well be a more difficult tragedy for the child to master psychologically.

Loss due to death is final....The impact of divorce is different....children logically assume that the divorce can be undone at any time....children who experience divorce are more likely to feel a persistent, gnawing sense that the loss of the intact family is not final; maybe it can be repaired....Thus children's capacity to cope with divorce is very much decreased by the uncertainty of the event itself...(pp. 13-14).

Children do not perceive divorce as a second chance, and this is part of their suffering. They feel that their childhood has been lost forever. Divorce is a price *they* pay, as forfeiture to their parents' failures, jeopardizing their future lives....

I was surprised to discover that the severity of a child's reactions at the time of the parents' divorce does not predict how that child will fare five, ten, and even fifteen years later...Some of the most troubled, depressed, and fretful children in our study turned out fine ten years later, while some of the least troubled, seemingly content, and calmest children were in poor shape ten and fifteen years later. *One cannot predict long-term effects of divorce on children from how they react at the outset* (p. 15, italics in original).

4. Long-term Emotional Results:

After ten years and sometimes fifteen years, among the children of divorce, strong emotions still persist:

Even though they no longer have any illusions that their parents could ever remarry their sense of loss and wistful yearning persists, and their emotions run deep and strong. They feel less protected, less cared for, less comforted....These children share vivid, gut-wrenching memories of their parents' separations (p. 23).

5. Fear of entering adulthood and making adult commitments

The entry into young adulthood occurs roughly between the ages of 18 and 23, and it is a difficult time for all young people, divorce or no divorce. To become an adult, one must have established in adolescence the sense of a separate identity. One must have the courage to try new ventures, to take chances. One must be able to seek out and establish an intimate and committed relationship. It helps enormously to have imprinted on one's emotional circuitry the patterning of a successful, enduring relationship between a man and a woman...It is parents who carve the deepest impressions on children.

All young people are profoundly afraid of making irrevocable mistakes while crossing the Rubicon into adulthood....

The children of divorce are likewise afraid, but more so....Now that it is time to venture forth, to trust, and to make a commitment, the children of divorce find that their search for love and intimacy is ghost-ridden. In adolescence they think about these issues, but in young adulthood anxiety about them hits full force. They fear betrayal. They fear abandonment. They fear loss. They draw an inescapable conclusion: relationships have a high likelihood of being untrustworthy; betrayal and infidelity are probable...

It is clear from talking to the young people in our study that the transition into young adulthood is especially difficult in ways they did not anticipate. Even those who do very

well in high school and who have many friends and stable relationships say that they experience rising anxiety in their late teens and early twenties. Feelings and memories about their parents' divorce arise with new intensity at this time...

The behavior of children of divorce is often at odds with their philosophy of high hopes and high morality....They abhor cheating yet find themselves in multiple relationships that lead to cheating. They want marriage but are terrified of it. They detest divorce but end up divorced. They believe in love but expect to be betrayed....

All hold two traits in common: fear of rejection and betrayal and a lifelong vulnerability to the experience of loss (pp. 55-56).

6. Children Who Have No Sense of Ambition or Direction

Over a third of the young men and women between the ages of 19 and 29 have little or no ambition ten years after their parents' divorce. They are drifting through life with no set goals, limited educations, and a sense of helplessness. Some stay home well into their twenties; others leave and wander without purpose. Many feel discouraged and rejected and....cannot close the door to the past, cannot give up the fantasy that history can be changed....They don't make long-term plans and are aiming below the intellectual and educational achievements of their fathers and mothers....Many have distant plans but no practical sense of how to put these plans into action. Of course, plenty of children from intact families show similar patterns; no adolescent is immune to feelings of rejection and low self-esteem. Our sample of divorced families, however, shows an exceptionally high number of these children (pp. 148-149).

7. Achievement in College Education

Another disturbing factor pointed out by Wallerstein is the fact that many of the children of divorce have significantly lower educational achievement than might have been predicted from the backgrounds in which they grew up:

Most of the youngsters in our study are from middle-class families where one or both parents have college degrees. Most of the children graduate from local high schools where 85% of the students routinely go on to college. And yet barely half of these boys and girls are attending or have completed a two-year or four-year college. One-third, including many very bright youngsters, dropped out of high school or college....Among fathers in our study who could afford to help with tuition, just over one-third helped their children, while two-thirds offered no assistance whatsoever....

This is not the way the world is supposed to work for these children, who are, after all, offspring of well-educated middle-class parents. Middle-class families are supposed to

encourage their children to go to college. Such parents traditionally make sacrifices to help pay for their children's higher education....

Many children of divorce do not feel encouraged in the same way that children from intact middle-class families do....Few divorce settlements make any arrangements for college education. Among all the children who are over 18 at the ten-year mark, 60% are on a downward educational course compared with their fathers and 45% are on a similarly downward course compared with their mothers (pp. 156-157, italics in original).

8. Relationships Between Children and Fathers

Low self-esteem in late adolescence is often related to unresolved psychological issues between divorced fathers and their children, in which the major strand is that the young people feel rejected, unloved, and undervalued. Children long for their fathers in the years after divorce, and those who are close to their fathers beforehand are especially preoccupied with the notion of restoring the closeness that they remember or fantasize....One of our major discoveries ten years after divorce is that this longing is infused with new intensity at adolescence. For girls, the intensity rises during early adolescence. For boys, the need for the father crests somewhat later - at age 16, 17 or 18....

One of the great tragedies of divorce is that many fathers have absolutely no idea that their children feel rejected....I have talked with many fathers who genuinely think that they have good relationships with their children, while the children feel rejected and miserable.

Interestingly, many of the young men in our study have devoted mothers - competent, dynamic women - but the mother-son relationship in divorce is often insufficient to compensate for the lack of a father in their lives....Without the continued support of their fathers, these boys lack self-confidence and pride in their own masculinity. The issue, although different, is just as serious for girls. Afflicted with a sense of longing and rejection, they too feel hurt, unsure of their femininity, and insecure in their relationships with men.

The situation may be especially painful when the father appears, say, once a year, suggesting that the rejection is not absolute. With one foot in the door and one foot out, the father by his occasional visits constantly reawakens hope and re-opens the fantasy door. This is a relationship that breaks children's hearts.

Many young people, especially boys, cannot express the anger they feel toward the parent who is rejecting them (pp. 149-151).

9. Emotional Distancing of Fathers from Children

A father's attitudes and feelings about his children can become blunted by divorce - a finding that took me by surprise and one that is hard to understand....In following our families over the years, we have seen that a father's commitment to his children does not necessarily carry over into the post-divorce years....

The psychological connection between father and child is weakened....For the child of divorce, this represents a grave injustice and a personal tragedy (pp. 158-159).

In her conclusion to the book, Wallerstein again returns to the problem caused by the distancing of fathers from children of divorce:

We have seen that the children's need for their father continues and that it rises with new intensity at adolescence, especially when it is time for the children to leave home (p. 302).

B. Effects Particularly Noticed in Girls

1. The "sleeper effect"

On pages 56 - 67, Wallerstein describes what she calls "the sleeper effect" on girls who seem to come through their parents' divorce quite well, but who face serious psychological problems in their late teens and early twenties. She tells, for example, about "Denise Moore," who at age 11 "was every parents' dream of the perfect daughter - competent, pretty, award winning, and smart" (p. 60). When her parents got divorced when Denise was 11, "nothing predicted the storm that lay ahead" (p. 60) because she continued to win awards in music, academics, and school sports. She went to UCLA and did very well in her freshman year, but that summer, she "fell apart." She aimlessly hitch-hiked from California to New York. She became anorexic, and seriously threatened her health. She became intensely angry. Wallerstein explains:

Denise was obsessed with the notion that her parents should have shown concern for her, should have fed her, nurtured her, and given her permission to feel....

The Moores' divorce produced in Denise deep-seated anxieties about relationships, fears that she vanished to the farthest recesses of her mind. But the feelings endured, only to re-surface ten years later. In a true sense, this can be considered a sleeper effect, a delayed reaction to an event that happened many years earlier. We saw many young women with acute, delayed depression that is certainly a sleeper effect of divorce and that can become very dangerous....

The sleeper effect is particularly dangerous because it occurs at the crucial time when many young women make decisions that have long-term implications for their lives. Entering young adulthood, they are faced with issues of commitment, love, and sex in an

adult context - and they are aware that the game is serious....The effects can be long lasting and tragic (pp. 60-61).

Wallerstein gives some direct quotes that indicates what some of these young women are feeling:

"I'm so afraid I'll marry someone like my dad."

"How can you believe in commitment when anyone can change his mind anytime?"

(p. 61).

Or then there is the quote from the 24 year-old successful magazine editor in New York City:

"I'm afraid to use the word *love* because relationships are too uncertain. You can hope that a relationship is going to be permanent, but you can't expect it...How can you ask anyone for a commitment when anyone can change his mind anytime?...I'm respected. I have friends. I keep busy, but it doesn't work. I get very depressed" (pp. 61-62).

In summary, Wallerstein says

The sleeper effect primarily affects young women, in part because girls seem to fare much better psychologically immediately after divorce than boys. Because girls appear so much better adjusted socially, academically, and emotionally every step of the way after divorce, much of the research about the effects of divorce on children emphasizes the good recovery of girls compared with the more troubled experience of boys...Ours is the first report of the sleeper effect in children of divorce.

2. Girls who Have Relationships with Older Men

A whole group of young women in our study were attracted primarily to older men. These are not one night stands. The women describe close relationships with these men and stress that they are well treated and cared for while the relationships last....When women talk about their older lovers, the emphasis is not on sex but on nurturing. As De-Lores says, "He takes care of me and cares about me"....

For most of the young women in our study, the relationships with older men represent primarily the search for the parent they never had....Trading sex for closeness now, they want to be held and cuddled by their older lovers, as if they are trying to recapture...the physical nearness that very young children seek by crawling into daddy's lap.

It is important to note that the young women in our study who experienced intense anxiety in their relationships with men had not actually been abandoned: They had ongoing relationships with their fathers....Almost half of those between the ages of 19 and 23 continued to see their fathers approximately once a month or more, often over dinner....

Despite the frequent contacts with their fathers, the young women do not feel that their fathers love or value them, and they speak about their fathers with a curious mix of affection and disdain. They go on at length about how little they trust them as parents.... (pp. 65-67).

3. Girls Who Go from One Relationship to Another

Wallerstein explains that another group of girls who are children of divorced parents failed to have any single stable relationship with a man, but instead go from one relationship to another. As an example, she gives an extensive quotation from "Tanya," who is 18 and has just finished high school:

"My real problem is that I never had a reliable man in my life....Mom works all the time and dad never comes to see us, so I just began to have lots of relationships, lots of boys. There isn't time since junior high that I haven't had a steady guy....I've had two abortions. That really makes me feel sad. I just wish I could relate to people in a healthy way....I was so disappointed by my dad. He let me down a lot. I think I'm trying to get back at him....by having so many guys" (pp. 162-163).

Wallerstein goes on to explain what has been happening with Tanya.

Despite her problems, Tanya is on course with much of her life, has done well academically, and is thinking of a career in accord with her talents....

In contrast with the rest of her life, though, Tanya's relationships with men are driven by her anger at her father and, as she says, by an intense fear of being alone. Tanya is frightened because an hour, a day, or a night alone is linked in her psyche with the fear of abandonment, fear of loneliness, and a profound sense of rejection....Tanya is only dimly aware that she uses sex to resolve these issues and to satisfy hungers that have little to do with sexual appetites. Indeed, many of the youngsters in the study use sex to shut out anxiety and ward off a sense of emptiness and depression, and they start it early. Over a quarter of the girls became sexually active in junior high school and have continued their sexual activity ever since....30% of the young women have had five or more relationships in the last five years. "Don't get too attached," says one 25 year-old. "If you don't build up a relationship, you don't fall so hard. I'm on a roller coaster. I fall in and out of love and in and out of relationships"

Acknowledging that her liaisons with men reflect anger and disappointment in both her mother and her father, Tanya....tells me that she wishes to belong to somebody, anybody, but fears that if she depends on or belongs to someone, "He will let me down. Like my dad let me down" (p. 162-164).

C. Effects Particularly Noticed in Boys

1. Absence of Career Stability for Young Men:

Many children who grow up in divorced families are not climbing the ladder as high as their parents....40% of the young men in our study are drifting....Only half manage to stay in school, even though they grew up in affluent communities in which 85% of their graduating classes go on to college... (p. 18).

2. Difficulties in relating to women:

Ten years after divorce, close to one-half of the boys, who are now between the ages of 19 and 29, are unhappy and lonely and have had few, if any, lasting relationships with young women (p. 67).

Wallerstein explains different ways in which boys respond to the experience of divorce. After describing one twenty-five year old man who is working on his doctorate in biology at Stanford University, but who is inhibited and socially withdrawn, she comments,

Many young men....seem to be able to shut their emotions away. As they mature, they too pay a price for this denial.

Uncomfortable in social situations, these young men are awkward with women and hold back on dating, even casual dating. When they do ask for a date and reach out for a relationship, they are incredibly vulnerable to rejection and are easily hurt by minor or imagined slights. As a result, they tend to live inhibited, lonely lives in which they may not acknowledge the loneliness...To avoid the pain of some feelings, they shut out all feelings. To avoid the pain of some memories, they banish whole segments of their lives from ready recall. As a result they are tragically constricted, suffering an inhibition that makes intimacy difficult to establish. Unable to share deeply hidden feelings, they build lifestyles of solitary interests and habits to protect these inhibitions from being tested (pp. 69-70).

3. Increased Delinquency and Violence:

Wallerstein explains that while some children of divorce turn their anger inward toward themselves and become depressed, others, especially boys, turn their anger outward toward society and engage in violent and criminal behavior:

In our study, one out of three of the young men and one in ten of the young women between ages 19 and 23 at the ten-year mark are delinquent, meaning they act out their anger in a range of illegal activities including assault, burglary, arson, drug dealing, theft, drunk driving, and prostitution. Many of these children get involved in one episode of

breaking the law before age 18, but a disturbing number of them continue this delinquency pattern into their early twenties.

Unlike many juvenile delinquents, who tend to be brutalized by poverty and crime in childhood, these young delinquents are saddened....Most feel rejected and abandoned by both parents. After the family structure collapses in adolescence, they do not recover....

At the fifteen-year follow-up, we do begin to notice a surprisingly high incidence of alcoholism in the children of divorce. 20% of all the children in our study are now drinking heavily. Out of this group, a third come from homes in which neither the parents nor step-parents have ever abused alcohol (pp. 153-154).

D. What Factors Can Help Minimize the Negative Consequences of Divorce on Children?

Although Wallerstein says that "all children suffer from divorce" (p. 303), and "Children of all ages feel intensely rejected when their parents divorce (p. 12), she does list some factors that were seen in the lives of those children who seemed less affected by divorce than the others. For example, she reports on one girl named "Dana," who, ten years after divorce, and then fifteen years after divorce (at age 14 and 19) seemed stable and well-adjusted. Wallerstein takes Dana to be quite unusual, and then lists five factors in Dana's life which contributed positively to her ability to cope with the trauma of divorce:

1. "Absence of open conflict" between the parents (p. 179).

Wallerstein goes on to explain:

Dana's mother was furious at the time of divorce and was still furious, five, ten, and fifteen years after the fact. Nevertheless, she was able, without dishonesty or hypocrisy, to keep her anger within bounds that protected her children from becoming innocent victims. Among all the things that people can do to protect their children in the wake of divorce, this is one of the hardest and one of the most important. It is, unfortunately, one of the least common....

Dana also benefitted from the fact that her parents, except for one screaming episode at their separation, did not physically or verbally attack one another. They tried from the start to limit the open conflict between them (p. 180).

2. The children had "continued good relations with each parent individually."

Wallerstein explained, "Dana's father continued to be her father, not a Dutch uncle or a playground director. He took an active interest in her upbringing, and her everyday life. He had standards to be enforced and values to be upheld, he was available when she was sick, and he supported her economically" (p. 180).

3. "A close mother-daughter relationship"

Wallerstein explains that Dana's mother "quickly resumed parenting" even though she also went back to school and worked toward a law degree (p. 181).

4. An "organized and well-planned" life.

Wallerstein explains:

I cannot repeat often enough that adolescent girls especially need home lives that are structured and organized....Meals are on time, and the family has dinner together in both households (p. 181).

5. A good relationship with step-parents.

6. Good relationships with "three sets of grandparents, all of whom are faithful to her, continuing over the years to reinforce her vision of a stable world" (p 182).

In chapter 17 (pp. 277-294), Wallerstein explains in further detail some things that parents can do to ease the pain of divorce if it happens, and to help children face the difficult challenges of living through this experience.

[It should be noted, however, that at the time the book was written Dana was only 19, and had not yet completed college, gotten married, and passed through the difficult early adult years in which Wallerstein says the "sleeper effect" often occurs in surprising ways in young women's lives. She appears to be doing well in light of her circumstances, but the whole story has not yet been told.]

IV. SUMMARY COMMENTS ON THE LONG-LASTING IMPACT OF DIVORCE

In summarizing some of the findings that Wallerstein discovered from her study, she starts with the following points:

-Divorce is a wrenching experience for many adults and almost all children. It is almost always more devastating for children than for their parents (p. 297).

-Divorce is not an event that stands alone in children's or adults' experience. It is a continuum that begins in the unhappy marriage and extends through the separation, the divorce, and any remarriages and second divorces.... (p. 297).

- The effects of divorce are often long-lasting. Children are especially affected because divorce occurs during their formative years. What they see and experience becomes a part of their inner world, their view of themselves, and their view of society.... (p. 298).
- Almost all children of divorce regard their childhood and adolescence as having taken place in the shadow of divorce.... (p. 298).

Although Wallerstein does say that many of the children emerge in young adulthood as "compassionate, courageous, and competent people" (p. 298), she also says the following:

- In this study....almost half of the children entered adulthood as worried, under-achieving, self-deprecating, and sometimes angry young men and women.... (p. 299)

-Adolescence is a period of grave risk for children in divorced families; those who entered adolescence in the immediate wake of their parents' divorces had a particularly hard time. The young people told us time and again how much they needed a family structure, how much they wanted to be protected, and how much they yearned for clear guidelines for moral behavior. They told us that they needed more encouragement from parents in the complicated process of growing up, and that, failing to get it, they were seduced by the voices of the street. Feeling abandoned at this critical time in their lives, they were haunted by inner doubts and uncertainties about the future. An alarming number of teenagers felt abandoned, physically and emotionally (p. 299).

-Finally, and perhaps most important for society, the cumulative effect of the failing marriage and divorce rose to a crescendo as each child entered young adulthood. It was here, as these young men and women faced the developmental task of establishing love and intimacy, that they most felt the lack of a template for loving, enduring, and moral relationship between a man and a woman. It was here that anxiety carried over from divorced family relationships threatened to bar the young people's ability to create new, enduring families of their own (p. 299-300).

V. MY CONCLUDING COMMENTS

At the end of this study I should say that I have simply reported the findings in this book without any evaluation on my part. As I explained at the beginning, I have emphasized the negative consequences of divorce as reported in this book. However, I should point out that the destructive consequences receive the dominant emphasis in Wallerstein's book as well, and the overall conclusions of the book are profoundly disturbing when read in its entirety because the destructive consequences on people's lives are so frequent and so profound.

It is not my intention to say that such consequences are inevitable, for statistics and probabilities do not imply certain results for any one individual. Nor is it my intention to excuse from moral responsibility those who go through a divorce and then adopt patterns of life that are clearly sinful in the light of biblical standards of moral conduct (such as juvenile delinquency or sexual

immorality). All people, including children, are morally accountable for the ways they act, even for the way they respond to very difficult situations.

Moreover, as a Christian, when was reading the book I thought again and again how much people hurt by divorce need the power of the Holy Spirit to heal their lives. For example, emotional factors such as long standing anger or fear can certainly be changed by the Holy Spirit's transforming power working within them in answer to prayer. In addition, well-functioning churches can often provide the effective "family" which will make up in some measure for what has been lost in a divorce.

Nevertheless, the tragic consequences of divorce should not be minimized. I am convinced that Wallerstein's study provides conclusive evidence that adults who initiate a divorce should realize that they are almost certainly inflicting on their children, of whatever age, a life-long injury of gigantic proportions, an injury of such magnitude that probably none of the parents who initiated the divorce could have predicted at that time. This tragedy is compounded by ignorance, for it seems that few of the parents after 10 or even 15 years really understood the depth of the harm that had been done to their own children's lives.

Finally, this study helps us understand more deeply the reason why God himself is so strongly opposed to divorce:

For I hate divorce, says the Lord the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless (Malachi 2:16).

Is divorce ever allowable then? I agree with the majority of Protestant Bible interpreters since the Reformation that there are only two situations in which God allows divorce (but even then it is not required), and in both cases remarriage to another person is also allowed: (1) Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 allow divorce and subsequent remarriage on the grounds of "sexual immorality" (that is, the physical act of adultery), and (2) 1 Corinthians 7:15 allows divorce in the case of irreparable desertion by a non-Christian spouse. In such cases divorce may be the tragic but best solution to an even worse situation.

Yet Wallerstein's study also helps us understand why God, who desires and seeks our good far more than we can understand, has established a wonderful moral standard of lifelong marriage between one man and one woman, as Jesus taught:

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:4-6).