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**Hopeful Facts About the *True* State of Marriage and Divorce**

**That Every Marriage Champion Needs to Know**

Ten years of interviews and surveys with 12,000 men and women and hundreds of marriage counselors have found one common denominator in whether a marriage survives or fails: Does the couple have a sense of hope -- or a sense of futility? If a struggling couple assumes they will make it, the outcome is often very different from when they think there is no point in trying.

The problem is that a subconscious sense of futility about marriage is everywhere, as everything we hear says marriage is “in trouble.” And while some of the bad news is accurate (for example, 41% of children are born out of wedlock), many of the most demoralizing beliefs just aren’t true! For example, the notion that half of all marriages end in divorce or that the divorce rate is the same in the church… neither are anywhere close to true.

The truth is that most marriages are healthier and happier than people believe. Getting the truth out will change the paradigm and show that we can still believe in marriage. Below are just a few results from an 8-year investigative study of the *truth* about the state of marriage and divorce in our culture and our churches in *The Good News About Marriage* by Shaunti Feldhahn (Multnomah Books/ May 6, 2014).

**Contrary to popular opinion, the good news is that….**

* **…the actual, current divorce rate has never gotten close to 50%.** According to the Census Bureau,[[1]](#footnote-1) 72% of people today are still married to their first spouse. And among the 28% who aren’t, a portion of those marriages ended in widowhood, not divorce. Thus, the current divorce rate is probably closer to 20-25% for first marriages and 31% for all marriages (including second and third marriages).[[2]](#footnote-2) The “50%” myth is based on years of projections that have never come to pass. So while a 20-25% divorce rate is still too high, the great truth is that most marriages last for a lifetime.
* **….most marriages are happy.** Although most people believe that only about a third of marriages are happy, in reality 80% of marriages are. In fact, many surveys show 91-97% saying their marriages are happy,[[3]](#footnote-3) with 93% saying they would marry their spouse all over again.[[4]](#footnote-4) In Feldhahn’s survey comparing spouses’ answers, 71% of couples were happy, with 34% being very happy.[[5]](#footnote-5) And if those who are most *un*happy stick with it, they rate their marriages as the most happy within five years.[[6]](#footnote-6)
* **…. the rate of divorce in the church is not the same as among those who don’t attend services.** The common belief otherwise is based on a misunderstanding of George Barna studies. In fact, every study that has been done has found that those who act on their faith by, for example, attendance at worship services, have a significantly lower divorce rate. Special analysis of the Barna data itself shows that among those who attend church, the divorce rate drops by 27%.[[7]](#footnote-7) Other studies have found the rate of divorce among church attenders falls even more, by up to 50%.[[8]](#footnote-8)
* **… most re-marriages survive just fine.** Although popular belief puts the divorce rate for second marriages at 60%+ and third marriages at 73%+, our investigation shows these numbers are pure urban legend. Census Bureau numbers show that 65% of those in second marriages are still married to their spouse, meaning only 35% of those marriages ended--with a significant percentage likely ending in death.[[9]](#footnote-9) Even for the highest-risk baby boomers, second marriages have only a 36% divorce rate.[[10]](#footnote-10) The greatest spike in divorce for remarriages occurs within the first five years. [[11]](#footnote-11)
* **… most marriage problems are not caused by ‘big ticket’ problems, and simple changes can make a big difference.** Most marriage problems are caused not by the ‘big ticket’ problems (e.g. one spouse is an alcoholic) but by hurt that was not intended. Fully 99%+ of married people care about their spouse and want the best for them. But in 82% of struggling couples, one partner is simply clueless instead of entrenched in hurt—and solving cluelessness is simpler than solving alcoholism.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In summary, although plenty of very real concerns exist about the state of marriage in our culture, many of the depressing “facts” that people think they know simply aren’t true. People today are living together or divorcing too quickly based on the lie that they cannot expect a strong and happy marriage for a lifetime, when the truth is far different. Getting the truth out that most marriages are stronger and happier than people believe truly will set people free.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Shaunti received her graduate degree from Harvard and started out on Wall Street. She unexpectedly became a social researcher and best-selling author equipping the church with eye-opening, life-changing truths about relationships in books such as *For Women Only,* which have sold 2 million copies in 22 languages. Her current goal is to encourage counselors, pastors, and leaders with this good news about marriage, and the truth that their hard work does make a difference.

**Christian Living/Marriage**

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1. Kreider, Rose M. and Renee Ellis, "Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 2009." Current Population Reports P70-125, U.S. Census Bureau (Washington: DC, 2011) (SIPP 2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Many studies have found similar numbers. For example, see University of Chicago, General Social Survey, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See for example, the General Social Survey, University of Chicago, multiple years; the University of Texas at Austin’s 2003-2004 survey for National Fatherhood Initiative; Marist Poll 2010 for Knights of Columbus. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The National Fatherhood Initiative Survey, University of Texas, Austin. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Surveys 2010-2012 for Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages, Shaunti Feldhahn [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Linda Waite, Institute of American Values, 2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Barna Group, OmniPoll (TM), 2008 Special Analysis for Shaunti Feldhahn [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For example, see W. Bradford Wilcox. “Is Religion the Answer?" 2008; or Vaaler, Ellison and Powers, “Religious Influences on the Risk of Marital Dissolution,” Journal of Marriage and Family, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kreider, Rose M. and Renee Ellis, "Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 2009." Current Population Reports P70-125, U.S. Census Bureau (Washington: DC, 2011) (SIPP 2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Alison Aughinbaugh, Omar Robles and Sun Hugette, “Marriage and divorce: patterns by gender, race, and educational attainment,” Monthly Labor Review (October 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. CDC National Survey of Family Growth, 2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages study, 2010-2012; Shaunti Feldhahn [↑](#footnote-ref-12)