

Question: How can parents who are divorcing help their children handle the difficulties of this situation?

While divorce is difficult for adults involved, it is even harder on their children. Research indicates that children handle divorce better when their parents do not get into bitter battles but try to work together in the interests of their children. With this in mind, I believe Jesus would draw on some principles from the New Testament that can help in this situation.

Parents who are divorcing need to have at least some individual counseling that can help each of them move beyond the hurt, bitterness and anger that usually go with this situation. The New Testament teaches us to “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31-32). Some people deny that they have any of these problems. But I find it difficult to believe that a person who has committed to any level of marital intimacy and love can avoid being affected by the loss of this relationship. Whether they are conscious or unconscious of these feelings, every divorced person has some kind of emotional scar. For the sake of themselves and for their children, they need to find a qualified Christian counselor who can help each of them deal with these serious issues.

Whatever a divorced couple may think of one another, both of them need to continue to be involved in the lives of their children. It is not easy to parent children when people have been divorced. The children should not be made to feel the need to choose one parent over the other. You may think it impossible to work cooperatively with your ex-spouse because of things said and done in the bitterness of a divorce; but for the sake of the children you must try. Just before describing the humility of Jesus and his giving himself to die for a sinful world, the apostle Paul wrote: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). If you truly love your children, see that they have time with both parents. It is the unselfish thing to do. However, there may need to be an exception if a parent has abused one of the children. This is not the case in most divorces I have known about.

In addition, each parent should vow never to speak derogatorily of an ex-spouse in the presence of their children. Ephesians 4:29 says: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” If at all possible, allow your children the right to have a relationship with both parents that is not filled with any fear or doubt.

Dr. Albert Solnit, director of the Yale Child Study Center, said, “If we lived in a world governed by children’s wishes, parents would not be allowed to divorce, no matter how disruptive the marriage.” Often children hold to a desire and hope for many years that their parents will re-marry. But whatever happens, having a Christ-like spirit can only help you and your children in most divorces move forward successfully in your future lives. Allow Jesus and the teachings of the New Testament to guide you in this and every part of your life.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th St, Murray, KY 42071; Email: universitychurch@murray-ky.net or phone (270) 753-1881] 2012/07/20