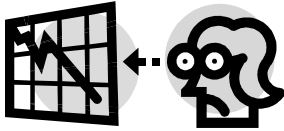


CULTURE



The attention to culture is not to really discuss the different cultures of the world but, instead, one defining measure of the culture – the marriage and the family. Changing attitudes, values, beliefs, and lifestyles have ushered in changes to the American family. The

illustration above, showing a shocked appearance to a declining graph, is to set-the-stage for the tone of my discussion: our culture, or more specifically the condition or state of the family, is in serious decline and may very well be approaching the endangered level.

The news of the day generally includes the topic of same-sex marriage. Depending on the news source, the reporting may include the latest legislative or state law initiatives, but invariably invokes a level of concern that marriage and the understanding of family has and continues to be redefined by the dynamics of our culture.

Until recently, divorce was on a continual rise in our country with an estimated 50% of all first-time marriages and 60% of second marriages ending in divorce. The recent idleness of this trend may be occurring because of the decline in marriage per capita, but I'm not sure. Still, the often used but neglected vow, *'till death do us part*, should probably be replaced by a more appropriate or applicable phrase. In my mind and from reading, the bonds or commitment of marriage as a covenant (promise before God) has given way to a marriage of convenience. This possible change seems to contradict to the idea of marriage and raise the question of who really loves whom.

The trend in divorce has created an increased level of single-parent homes where the parent, most often the mother, is the predominate parent-figure in the children's lives. The absence of both parents in the family has produced a host of social problems and elevated risks for the children: lower performance in school and higher drop-out rates; out-of-wedlock pregnancy; and increased drug and other criminal activity. From a read last year, a multi-decade study of several children of divorce showed alarming emotional and social problems for young and middle-aged adults – problems that did not manifest until after their adolescence.

My intention of this letter is not to condemn but rather to educate and prepare you for risks that you have and may incur. Yes, such risks would apply to all young people but you are not all young people – you are my people! Please understand that you that these words are not meant to hurt or hinder, but to help you remain firm and steadfast in a changing

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