



## Divorce Rates are NOT What You Think They Are!

May 27, 2021 by [Shaunti Feldhahn](#)

Wedding season is here and it's a time of hope and new beginnings. But while we are always happy for the bride and groom, there is also an undercurrent of concern out there for couples who are tying the knot.

You've probably heard the statistics that say half of marriages end in divorce—statistics that cause many brides and grooms (and the onlookers at their wedding) to wonder whether a happy lifelong marriage is likely, or even possible. And with those doubts clouding the air on the big day, what attitude or mindset is being established for the happy couple as they begin their journey of married life?

In our book [The Good News About Marriage: Debunking Discouraging Myths about Marriage and Divorce](#), my Senior Researcher, Tally Whitehead, and I share **encouraging news about the state of marriage in our country**. It's good news that *must* be spread far and wide—especially during wedding season—in order to reassure the brides and grooms we know, and to uphold the fact that the idea of love for a lifetime is *not* old-fashioned and it *is* possible!

So here are four encouraging facts about marriage we'd like to share with you.

### **FACT #1: The divorce rate for society as a whole is not 50% and has never been anywhere close.**

Everyone believes there is a 50% divorce rate. There isn't, and there never has been, *for society as a whole*. For high-risk groups, yes. (If you get married as a teenager, that group hits that rate—but that is less than 5% of the population!)

What's the divorce rate, then? Let me say that understanding this is incredibly complicated, controversial, and there is no way to know one "real" number. That is why it took us 8 years

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before we published *The Good News About Marriage* (and why we need to point you to the book for the hundreds of citations and sources!). But the bottom line is this: in looking at data from the Census Bureau and other reliable sources, it appears that somewhere around 25% of first marriages end in divorce—and the divorce rate has only continued to decline since we published the book! That’s still too high, but it’s a universe different from what we think it is!

This means, if you’re getting married, you can be assured of this awesome fact: *Most marriages are strong and happy for a lifetime!*

Jeff and I have seen in our research with thousands of people for our books that when people get into trouble in their marriage, there’s a sneaking feeling that arises: “If the ship is going to sink anyway, why bother trying to bail it out?” It makes an enormous difference if you think to yourself (or tell a troubled friend), “The ship *isn’t* going to sink! You’re going to make it. *Most marriages do.*”

## **FACT #2: The rate of divorce in the church is not the same as society—in fact, it’s nowhere close.**

Although there is controversy about what the divorce rate is, there is *no* controversy about this. Every demographer knows that statement is true: it’s just that every churchgoer doesn’t!

In fact, a long-term Harvard study, published in 2018, found that in the population they tracked, the divorce rate for those who attended church regularly was 50% lower than the divorce rate of those who didn’t!

## **FACT #3: Remarriages don’t have an insanely high divorce rate.**

Do you know anyone who is heading into a second marriage? I talk to people all the time who are—and who are subconsciously expecting that they have a high chance of failure. Because that is what they’ve heard.

Just as for first marriages, no one knows what the exact divorce rate is for second and third marriages. But it turns out all those super high divorce rates you’ve heard—66%, 72%, etc.—are an urban legend. We detail more in *The Good News About Marriage*, but the bottom line is we traced all those references and they tie back to sources that don’t exist.

My favorite example was from Dr. Jennifer Baker, who is a well-known researcher that was quoted in a popularly referenced Psychology Today article as saying she discovered these super high divorce rates. When we asked to look at her study so we could see her methodology, she emailed us back saying “Unfortunately, these statistics are not mine, and

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even though I have asked the website to remove my name as a source, I've been unable to get them to do so."

It would be funny... if it hadn't caused so many people to give up on their second marriages.

So, if you're in a second or third marriage, please know that although no one knows exactly what those divorce rates are, they're a whole lot closer to first marriage divorce rates than people think. **Based on Census Bureau data, the divorce rate for remarriages is probably more like 30%.**

## FACT #4: Most marriages aren't just "meh"—they're actually happy!

Both our studies and all the other studies on satisfaction in marriage that have been done in recent years have found that contrary to popular opinion, most marriages are not "just sort of bumping along." They're made up of two people who actually really enjoy being married and enjoy being married to each other.

The average percentage of couples being happy in marriage hovers around 80%. (Our study for our book *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages*, which independently surveyed both the husband and the wife, found that 71% percent were both happy, and other studies have found more than 90%!)

Be encouraged! The bottom line is that most marriages not only *last for a lifetime*—they are *happy*! And it's not just the engaged and newlywed couples that need to hear this good news—it's *all* couples.

Family Life Today podcast w/ Wayne Grudem [6 min. 30 secs.]

Divorce rates of people who are committed/regular churchgoers is NOT the same as non-churched people. Current research shows that 72% of married people in the church are still in their first marriage. The remaining 28% includes many remarried widow/ers. The actual divorce rate of practicing Christians is only about 10-12%.

<https://www.familylife.com/podcast/familylife-today/what-does-the-bible-say-about-divorce-wayne-grudem/>

