

Marriage Is Under Attack in America

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By Eric Metaxas

MANHATTAN, N.Y.—They say Rome wasn’t built in a day, but you can do something to help rebuild marriage in just one week.

It’s almost become a cliché to say that marriage is under attack in America. But the trends and statistics are undeniable.

Here are some data points.

- *Marriage rates:* In 1970, 80 percent of all adults were married; today it’s only 52 percent. In 1960, the median age for a first marriage was 20 for women and 23 for men. Today it’s 27 for women and 29 for men.
- *Millennials:* A full 25 percent of millennials are likely to forego marriage altogether. One report says that a record share of millennials will remain unmarried through age 40.

That Christians are concerned about the institution of marriage is nothing new. But, when leading cultural gatekeepers catch on, it’s eye-opening. Sam Sturgeon, president of Demographic Intelligence, says bluntly that the United States has been experiencing a “cultural retreat from marriage.”

Mr. Sturgeon cites two factors: a stumbling economy that has hit men—particularly blue-collar men—*hard*, making them less likely to be seen as marriage material. A second is the growing willingness of couples to cohabit—what used to be called “shacking up”—and even bring children into the world without benefit of a lifelong marriage commitment.

The effects on such children can be devastating. Children from divorced or never-married homes are more likely to die in infancy, more likely to get divorced themselves or become unwed parents later in life, more likely to live in poverty, more likely to fail in school, less likely to graduate from college and get a good job, less likely to be in good physical health, more likely to abuse drugs as teens and adults, have lower life expectancies, have higher rates of mental illness, be at greater risk of suicide and child abuse—and on and on.

That’s why I am extremely pleased to tell you about National Marriage Week,

an annual campaign in more than 20 countries to strengthen marriages, cut the divorce rate and foster a culture that supports strong marriages. It is held every year from February 7 through 14.

As *National Review's David French* notes, "When culture changes this profoundly, it creates wounds public policy simply can't heal."

My very good friend Sheila Weber, executive director of National Marriage Week, puts it well. She says, "For the sake of raising the next generation, we think that marriage deserves just as much of a positive campaign as does recycling, anti-smoking, or healthy eating." And it's hard to argue with that.

Yet it doesn't take a village to restore marriage so much as it takes a *church*. David French continues: "It will take a culture change on the same scale as the sexual revolution that fractured families and even now relentlessly teaches the gospel of self-indulgence. It will take a renewed love for the 'least of these' in our American family, and it will take men and women who care for others not just by sending money but by creating deep and meaningful relationships."

This will also require an unflinching commitment to teaching what the Bible says about marriage as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman under God's loving care. Sheila Weber, by the way, is a Colson Fellow, so she knows all about the power of a biblical worldview to change lives and, ultimately, a culture.

While God gives some of us the noble calling of singleness, we can't forget this good word from Martin Luther: "There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage."