



HOW DIVORCE CAN SHATTER A CHILD'S FAITH, PART 1

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By Wayne D. Stocks

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A couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to teach our first through fifth graders at church about the term faith. The jumping off point of our discussion was the story of Jesus and the Centurion's servant as relayed in Matthew 8:5-13. In that story, Jesus agreed to heal the Centurion's servant after being amazed by his faith. Matthew tells us:

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. [Matthew 8:10]

After discussing the story, the lesson covered five questions to help lay a foundation for faith in Jesus Christ. The five questions included:

1. Who do we put our faith in?
2. What is faith?
3. Why do we need faith?
4. Where does faith come from?
5. What do we do with faith?

The more I studied for this lesson and reviewed scriptures related to each point, the more I began to understand why the divorce of a child's parents can, and oftentimes does, shatter their faith in God. More than just inconveniencing a child, or making them mad or upset, divorce cuts through them at a very deep theological level leaving them questioning everything they have ever believed in and/or preventing them from trusting in Jesus Christ in the future.

In this first installment in a three part series on the issue of faith in children of divorce, we will examine the first two questions related to faith and how divorce can impact a child's faith, or ability to have faith, in God. Next week, in part 2, we will examine the final three questions. In two weeks, in the final installment, we will ask what the church can do to help restore the faith of these children of divorce.

WHO DO WE PUT OUR FAITH IN?

The answer to the first question, who do we put our faith in, is, I hope, very obvious. We put our faith in Jesus Christ. Acts 20:21 tells us:





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I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. [Acts 20:21]

Jesus is The Way, the truth and the life – no one comes to the Father except through Him. He is worthy of our faith. Jesus made everything and sustains everything in the universe. He chose to die on the cross for our sins. Ultimately, the point is that Jesus is worthy of our faith, and we can and should put our faith in Him.

For many children, this is an “easy sell.” If someone made me and gives me every good thing, of course I want to put my faith in Him. But, for the child of divorce who had that type of relationship with her earthly parents only to have that shattered in a moment, it is harder (and sometimes impossible) to convince them that anyone is worthy of their faith. If you can't have faith in your parents to sustain the only environment and home you've ever known when you see them every day, how can you put your faith in someone that you cannot see? For children of divorce, this is a much more difficult, and much more intense decision of faith which leads well to our second point.

WHAT IS FAITH?

For purposes of teaching kids about faith, I used the “short” definition that:

FAITH = TRUST

Faith in God boils down to trusting that what God says is true and relying on Him to do what He has promised. While that is an adequate, and I think accurate, definition of biblical faith, I am much more comfortable with going to scripture for a definition of something like faith, and for that we turned to Hebrews 1:1:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. [Hebrews 11:1]

Let's look at both parts of that definition. Faith is confidence in what we hope for. That means being certain that what we hope for is going to happen. I gave the kids the example of a tight rope walker. If you sat and watched a tight rope walker walk across a high wire 100 feet in the air, you would likely believe that they could do because you saw it with your own eyes. But, suppose that tight rope walker came up to and said, “this time I want to walk across with you on my shoulder.” For you to put your faith in that person (even though you have seen it done), you would have to be confident in what you hoped for (that he wouldn't drop you). As Christians, what we put our hope in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We place our hope in the fact that Christ dies on the cross for our sins and that, if we place our faith in Him, that we will one day live with Him forever the way we designed to live. We hope in Jesus.





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This verse also tells us that faith is assurance about what we do not see. We put our assurance in things we cannot see every day. We have some level of assurance that the air we breathe in every minute will sustain us. We trust in gravity to keep us from floating off into space. As Christians, we place our trust in a God that, although we cannot see him, has revealed himself in creation, in His Word and in the lives of millions upon millions of Christians throughout history.

After Jesus' resurrection, he was talking to Thomas (of "doubting Thomas" fame). Thomas proclaimed Jesus to be "My Lord and my God!" Jesus replied with:

"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." [John 20:29 ESV]

So,

"...faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

As Christians, our initial faith (confidence and assurance) is based on some combination of God's revelation of himself in creation and in the Bible and/or the testimonies about God of other people who have placed their faith in Him. As we live our Christian life, that faith is bolstered and reinforced by our own personal experiences with God. Rather than the blind faith that so many in the world accuse Christians of exhibiting, true saving faith involves a considered decision to place our trust in Jesus based on a confidence and assurance that what God says is true.

When it comes to God, our faith is based on an immutable (unchanging) God who does not, and cannot, violate His promises. Oftentimes, the closest we get to that type of relationship here on Earth is that between a child and his or her parents. It is a relationship born out of total dependence and trust. A child is born into a family with a mother and father and comes to rely on, and trust in, them completely. They become the child's sense of being, sense of security and the measuring stick by which the child measures his life.

When that ends in divorce, it is more than just a child's home that is shattered. It is his sense of being. It is the sense of trust that the child has placed in the two most important people in his life. If a child's parents can let him down and turn his world upside down in an instant without even consulting him, then how can that child learn to trust another human being that he can see, let alone a God who he cannot see? The sense of trust and faith is forever altered by the two people God put in his life to model God's love. That is an earth shattering, faith shaking event, in the life of a young person that ripples of which will be felt throughout his lifetime. If an earthly father can let him down so significantly, than why would a child expect anything else from a heavenly



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father?

Join us next week as we examine the questions:

3. Why do we need faith?
4. Where does faith come from?
5. What do we do with faith?

We will also examine how divorce impacts the answers to these questions for children of divorce. In two weeks, we will look at what the church can do to help restore the faith of these children.

