

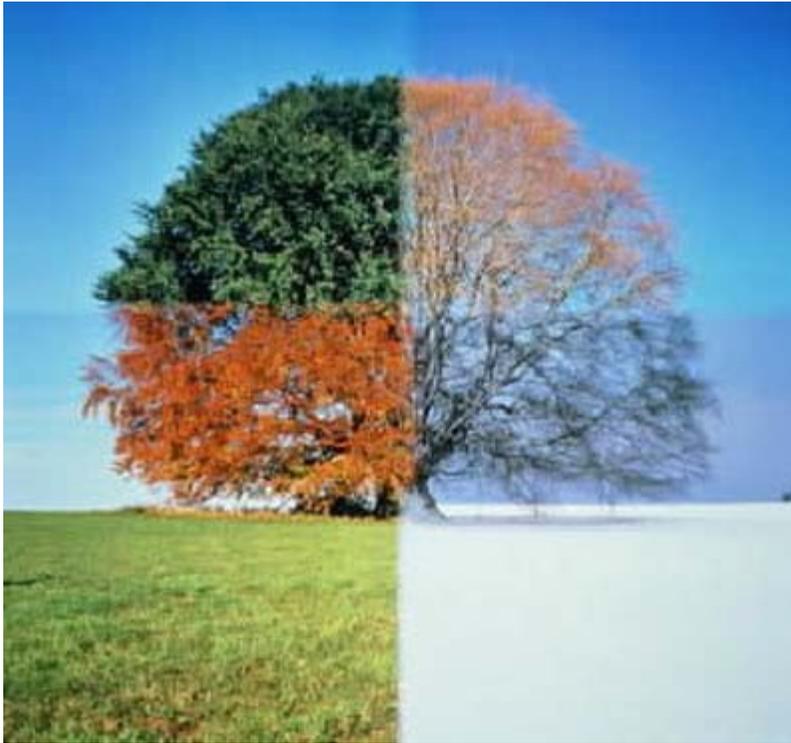


IT'S NOT ALWAYS ABOUT THE DIVORCE

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By Wayne D. Stocks

04/30/2012



Today's article is a reminder for those of us who work with kids whose parents have divorced. It is as much, if not more, of a reminder to me than anyone else. When we start to focus on the position and needs of children of divorce, and we should, it is easy to fall into the trap of seeing everything in their lives as revolving around the divorce. On the one hand, we are telling them,

*You are not defined by divorce!
This divorce is not who you are.
You are a masterpiece of God, and
nothing your parents have done
changes that.*

On the other hand, every time something doesn't go right in their lives or things aren't as they should be, we define those things in terms of the divorce. Little

Timmy is having problems with authority – It must be because his dad isn't around as much after the divorce. Poor Suzie seems a little sad today – It must be because today is the day she has to leave her Dad's house to go back to her Moms. We analyze. We assume. We conclude, and we do it all because we want to help these kids. But, in the end, we end up defining them by the divorce of their parents – the very thing we are telling them that they should not do themselves.

No doubt, there is a fine line to walk when it comes to balancing not overemphasizing the divorce with actually helping the child through divorce. None of this is meant to minimize in any way the heart wrenching impacts of divorce on children or intimate that it will just "get better with time." The whole notion is more a way of making ourselves feel better about the situation than it a way of actually helping the kids. Ecclesiastes 3:1 begins by telling us,

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. (Ecclesiastes 3:1
ESV)*

The remaining verses of this famous portion of Scripture provide sound guidance in dealing with children of divorce. Let's examine them a little closer.





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Time to Weep, Time to Laugh

...a time to weep, and a time to laugh; [Ecclesiastes 3:4a]

There is definitely weeping that goes along with divorce for a child. The emotions and changes are overwhelming, and kids need to talk about them. That said, we do these kids a disservice when we force them to dwell on the divorce because we bring it up over and over again in our efforts to get them to talk. Even in the midst of dealing with divorce, there is still a time to laugh.

Time to Mourn, Time to Dance

...a time to mourn, and a time to dance; [Ecclesiastes 3:4b]

Divorce does involve a mourning process. The child must mourn the death of their parents' marriage and the life they used to know. However, mourning does not mean being sad every second of the day. There will be times during the mourning process when the child just wants to be a kid again and dance or have fun.

Time to Embrace, Time to Refrain

...a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; [Ecclesiastes 3:5b]

Have you ever felt smothered? It's not a comfortable feeling. Many times when children are going through a rough time (like when their parents divorce), our instinct is to want to just give them a hug and make everything better. There is a time for these hugs to let kids know that you are there and that you care for them, but make sure that you are not overdoing it. These kids need help and empathy, but they don't want to be pitied.

Time to Seek, Time to Lose

...a time to seek, and a time to lose; [Ecclesiastes 3:6a]

There is a time to seek – to look for and remember and celebrate the way things used to be. There is nothing wrong with that, and we should encourage children of divorce to do just that. But, there is also a time to lose – a time to let go of how things used to be. We should not force kids to do one or the other but help them at their own pace both to embrace their new life and celebrate the old.





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Time to Keep, Time to Cast Away

...a time to keep, and a time to cast away; [Ecclesiastes 3:6b]

For children of divorce working through the emotions that come along with it, there is a time to keep and a time to cast away. Emotions must be dealt with, talked about and worked through. As those who minister to children of divorce, we must be willing to be there with them and encourage them and assist them on this journey. There is also a time to cast away. Once emotions have been dealt with once and for all, it is time to cast those away and look towards the future that God has laid out before us.

Time to Tear, Time to Sew

...a time to tear, and a time to sew; [Ecclesiastes 3:7a]

Divorce is a tearing apart. Divorce tears apart families and kids and households, and that tearing results in hurt and pain. Eventually though, there is a time to sew. The pieces will not look the same, and the result of that sewing will not resemble what it once was, but God can knit a child's life back together in a way that is even stronger than before. We must constantly point them towards God and His truth.

Time for Silence, Time to Speak

...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; [Ecclesiastes 3:7b]

This may be the toughest one for those of us who work with children of divorce. There is a time for silence. There is a time where kids need to process the emotions boiling up inside of them, and the best thing we can do is just be there to listen to them. There is also a time to speak – a time to speak wisdom and counsel into their lives. The difficulty lies in knowing the difference between the two.

For everything, there is a season. Sometimes children of divorce will want, and need, someone who can empathize with them and help them to deal with the lingering effects of their parents' divorce. Other times though, kids just want to be kids. We should help them to do both!

