



The Masculinist #40: What to Do When Your Wife Divorces You

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Welcome back to the Masculinist, the newsletter about how we live as Christian men and as the church in the modern world.

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How Should We Change in Light of the Coronavirus?

On May 28th at Noon US Eastern Time, I am going to be doing a webinar with Alastair Roberts and C. R. Wiley on how we think about and respond to the coronavirus. Please sign up here: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_UD55ksoVSs2HB54eJom-gw

Alastair Roberts is a theologian who is the author of *Heirs Together*, a forthcoming book on the theology of the sexes. He has two web sites. [Alastair's Adversaria](#) is for his written work and [Adversaria Videos and Podcasts](#) for his audio-visual pieces, which is where he is producing most of his new work.

C. R. Wiley is a Presbyterian minister who is a leader in thinking about how to recreate the functional household in the 21st century. His books include *Man of the House* and *The Household and the War for the Cosmos*.

Both of these men are extremely thoughtful people who've been digging deep into the Christian life in the modern world. You won't want to miss what they have to say, so please register today: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_UD55ksoVSs2HB54eJom-gw. Again, the date is May 28th at 12:00pm US Eastern Time.

Also, I'm thinking about starting a podcast. I was originally planning to limit it to financial supporters, but while they were enthusiastic, I also got some encouragement to make it public. So if you'd be interested in a podcast, please [email me](#) to let me know.

Support the Masculinist

A want to give a very big Thank You! to those who signed up to financially support the Masculinist. Without your help, this newsletter is not possible to produce.

For those of you who are able, please also become a financial supporter. There are three ways to do so:

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But even for this who can't or chose not to be a financial supporter, you can still help by spreading the word about the Masculinist to anyone you think might benefit from it.

When Your Wife Divorces You

A reader emailed me earlier this year to say:

I am now at the age (sadly) when I have some good Christian male friends who have been abandoned by their wives and are now divorced against their will. Not in every case, but unfortunately in the majority of cases, it seems that this leads to a path of bitterness towards the church and God on their part and as they become very difficult people to maintain fellowship with. They become erratic, emotional, paranoid about gossip, judgmental of others especially leaders, rejection and hostility of anyone who has spoken hard truths to them, lashing out against people who have tangential connection to their situation, complaining of a lack of support at the same time they actively avoid any form of contact with Christian brothers & sisters, etc. How can we best love our Christian brothers when painful things like this happen to them?

It's well established that women initiate the vast majority of divorces – about 70% of them (though the specific number varies by source). If women filed for divorce at the same rate as men, it would cut the number of divorces in half. Nothing better demonstrates that [we don't live in a patriarchy](#) than the statistics on divorce.

Certainly many men do dump their wives. I've seen it happen personally in the most stereotypical of ways, such as a man in the midlife crisis zone reconnecting with his high school girlfriend on Facebook, then running off with her.

There are also men who do things that would cause most people to see a divorce as justified: having an affair, physical abuse, etc.

Even so, in my experience, the majority of divorces are women divorcing their husbands for no reason that any church would consider theologically justified. The research is not conclusive, but from the studies I have read also lean this direction. And I've seen some truly extreme cases, like my former pastor's wife dumping him after he was disabled in an accident.

So what do you do if that happens to you? And how should we as friends or as the church help men in these situations? I am covering the first of these in today's newsletter, and planning to cover the second next month.

As it happens, I myself was previously divorced. I'm not going into any specifics because I want to respect my ex-wife's privacy. But when I talk about this, I'm not just drawing on observations of others but also personal experience. So I think I satisfy the "skin in the game" principle.

Because I've been through it, I know better than to give trite answers or act like there's some simple solution or course of action. It's not that simple. I will instead try to give some more general principles that I hope you find helpful, along with some tools that I used that helped me.

Even if you are not personally going through this, I hope you still find it valuable. It may be useful for friends that you know when it happens to them. But also, in today's world, no married man is immune from the risk of divorce. If you think it could never happen to you, think again. If you don't believe me, just ask your divorced friends how many of them saw it coming.

From what I see, men tend to end up on one of two paths after this kind of divorce. A number of them end up like the people in that email above, falling into a downward spiral from which they never emerge. Another group is able to recover from the crisis, often transformed and sometimes with their lives improved over the longer term.

In my view, the most important thing to do when your wife divorces you is to make sure you end up in the second category not the first one, to be one of the people who recovers and perhaps even becomes transformed for the better as a result of the experience.

When you are going through an extended personal crisis like divorce, cancer, or the death of a spouse or child, the future can seem grim. It can feel like we will never heal and nothing will ever be ok again.

It's natural to go through the stages of grief. But for those of you who are going through a divorce right now, I can tell you it does get better. There is hope, even if you can't see it now. If you don't lose sight of that and determine that you will make it through the experience, I'm convinced you can.

With that in mind, I will share some observations.

1. Recognize that recovering from divorce is likely to be a long ordeal, probably around three to five years. Some people, such as those in their mid-20s who rapidly divorce without children, can recover quickly and write theirs off as

a “starter marriage.” For those who are older, have been married longer, or who have children, it’s usually much more difficult and takes much longer than we would like.

Not only does divorce itself require time to recover from, it is often paired with other life setbacks. In fact, those setbacks are often one of the precipitators of a wife-initiated divorce. I mentioned above my pastor whose wife divorced him after he became disabled. But more often it’s some sort of career reversal. Divorce becomes more likely when the wife’s career is doing well and the husband’s career is not. Marriages are [more likely to end in divorce](#) when the wife makes more money than the husband. Male unemployment, for example, [raises the risk](#) of divorce. (That includes the wife divorcing him, but also him leaving his wife). This means that those of you who have lost your job due to coronavirus are at elevated risk for divorce right now. That’s just reality.

So there’s a decent chance that not only are you dealing with the divorce, itself a big emotional and financial blow, but also with some sort of other major personal problem that compounds it. Realistically, that’s going to take time to recover from.

Especially if you are early in the process, this probably isn’t pleasant news to hear, but understanding it can help you persevere when you are still stuck in the valley. You can and will come out on the other side if you keep marching forward. That’s true even if you have children, which causes lifelong complication. Most people seem to come to some sort of workable equilibrium over time, even if there’s an extended period of acrimony.

2: [Recognize that you have been a victim of injustice](#). I’m assuming here that your wife didn’t catch you in an affair, that you didn’t beat her, etc. but rather this is the more ordinary case of divorce without due cause.

For Christian men (though not necessarily other men), I see a great tendency for them to find ways to end up blaming themselves for the divorce even when their wife divorces them against their will. A lot of today’s Protestant theology holds men responsible for anything that happens in the home, even the things his wife or children do, so this is in line with various teachings.

When something like your wife divorcing you happens, it’s natural to ask ourselves, “What could I have done differently?” As we are all sinners, it’s always very easy for us to find many bad traits and bad actions in ourselves, which we can then blame for what has happened to us.

This is compounded by Christianity’s stress on forgiveness. Especially today this can be stressed to the practical exclusion of justice. Many others have already written about how the command to forgive has been used to deny justice in cases of abuse in the church, for example.

While we should certainly always look to identify and correct our own mistakes and wrongs, and while we are commanded to forgive, those things do not justify someone else committing a crime, act of abuse, or other injustice against us. Full stop.

While how you act towards her and navigate the divorce process is your decision, it’s important to be clear to yourself that her actions are wrong and are an evil committed against you (and your children if you have them).

Just as you can’t love your enemy until you first acknowledge that he is your enemy, you can’t forgive someone who’s wronged you unless you first acknowledge the full scope of the evil that was done.

3. [Avoid wallowing in bitterness](#). The opposite risk of failing to recognize your wife’s sin against you (or somehow finding ways to justify or minimize it) is that you fall into anger, resentment, and bitterness yourself.

Realistically, if someone does something bad to us, we are going to be angry about it. In fact, if we aren’t disturbed at some level, we probably haven’t fully accepted the reality of what that person has done. But we also need to make sure we go through the healing and forgiveness process and not end up stuck there (and also to remember that the anger of men does not accomplish the righteousness of God).

This bitterness can be directed not just at your ex-wife, but also at others we feel who have let us down: pastors, friends, etc. If you aren’t careful, you can end up like the people in that email above, which ends up repelling the very folks you need to help you move forward. I’ve seen way too many bitter, cynical, nihilistic people like this who populate the comment sections of manosphere type blogs. Don’t let that happen to you.

One thing I did in my divorce was to create a document with four sections: her good qualities, what I got out of being married to her, ways I hurt her, and ways she hurt me. I then prayed through these several times. I think it gave me a

balanced perspective, especially over time, that did not lead to bitterness or to ignoring the realities of her actions.

4. Recognize that it will take a long time to fully discern the lessons you should take from your divorce. It's natural for us to reflect on something bad that happened and try to learn what we did wrong so that we can correct it in the future.

In some cases, like say losing a game in sports, it's pretty easy to dig right in and do this. In more complex situations of life, however, it can be very difficult for us to properly discern what actually went wrong and what we need to do. That's because our mental models determine how we think about these situations, and our mental models are often wrong.

One commonly held model among Christians, for example, is the servant leader model, which is [completely false](#) as a model of attraction. This leads people in failed relationships or marriages to consider the ways in which they failed to act like servant leaders, and resolve to do better next time (or even to blame their own lack of servant leadership as the reason for the divorce). Sadly, they will likely discover the hard way again that doesn't work.

A few months after my divorce I sat down and wrote out a series of nineteen personal failings that I felt had to be fixed before I could even contemplate being in another relationship. They were all substantive, legitimate items. But thinking back now, it seems to me that - putting her actions to the side and looking only at my own - the more decisive factors were not things that I did wrong, but the things I did that I thought were right. In particular, the very things I was most of proud of for being servant leader-like (before I'd even heard the term) were deeply counter-productive. It was only years later that I came to understand this.

It's not uncommon for men who have been divorced to find their way to some "red pill" site and discover the shocking reality that their entire way of thinking about women and relationships was based on lies. Some of them sadly end up embracing the kind of nihilistic visions that the red pill community propagates. They end up as bitter, cynical, angry people (or worse) in the comment sections.

Be open to learning that your previous belief systems were wrong, but don't give in to that kind of bitterness. Instead look to incorporate the truth into a system of belief that is more true to reality (recognizing that we'll always have blind spots and errors) but still Christian and hopeful.

You can start by reading my material on attraction and relationships in [Masc #17](#), [Masc #18](#), [Masc #21](#), and [Masc #23](#). But just realize that if you are recently divorced, there's probably a lot you don't know, and as the saying goes, a lot of things you do know that ain't so.

Even so, it is worth writing down what you think your lessons learned are early in the healing process. That will give you a good baseline to refer back to when seeing how your thinking has or has not changed over time.

5. Lean into your support network, recognizing that they will struggle to help you and may well fail you. If you are going through a personal trauma like divorce, you need to have personal relationships to sustain you through that. Sadly, many men don't have many other male friends, and divorce itself may end up cutting you off from what you thought was your support network. Many married men, for example, are friends primarily with other married couples, and that because the wives are friends with his wife. It can end up that the divorcing wife keeps the friends and the husband gets frozen out or ends up more distant from his previous network.

Churches tend to be unrelentingly pro-wife in their public teachings, but in my admittedly limited observations, pastors tend to be more evenhanded in private counseling situations. Nevertheless, you may find yourself explicitly or more likely implicitly expelled from your church. The other women of the church may well side with your ex-wife, which can render your position untenable.

In either case, I don't think there's much to be gained to try saving these relationships once they evaporate or go south, except for other men who were your personal friends prior to meeting and marrying your wife. In my view, they are just part of the losses you take when divorce happens. Best to accept it and move on. You can always try to rebuild these relationships later when the fallout of the divorce has died down.

You do need to press into what relationships with other men you do have. (I'd avoid relationships with women like the plague - see below). This might have to be with people at a new church. Just recognize that they are going to struggle to support you. What would you say to someone whose child has died, or who is dealing with cancer, etc.? I bet you'd struggle to find the right words. Life's worst experiences are terrible to endure, and even for those who have previously gone through them it can be difficult to know what to say to someone to whom it is happening now. Divorce is not the worst thing that can happen to you, but it's on the list of bad things. This makes it hard for people to know

how to help you. Recognize too that you are yourself probably a pain in the butt to put up with (see that email above).

Looking back at the time after my divorce, my friends and ministers from the church seem to me to have been serious and genuinely motivated to help me. But probably 90% of the value was in just having someone willing to listen to me rampage. The contents were irrelevant. It may well be the same for you. You need people you can simply connect with. But it's likely to be awkward and you shouldn't expect too much insight.

There are a couple of possibilities to consider apart from friends, family, and the church to talk to. One is to see a therapist if you can afford it. If nothing else, they are paid to listen to you unload on them. Just having an outlet like that for venting might be useful, but it's something of a crapshoot as to how much value you'll get. You can always treat it as an experiment. If it's valuable, great. If not, that's all right too. You can always stop going.

The second is to seek to befriend someone who is in even worse shape than you. This may require you to have done some healing first, but is a great way to keep you from falling into that bitterness spiral.

A former pastor of mine used to observe that even when you are focused on overcoming your sin, you are still focused on yourself. The Christian life always has an other-focused element to it. We fall into a trap when we end up obsessively focused on ourselves, even when we are focused on our own legitimate problems. Clearly there are times when we can't do much for others and have to take care of our own business, but most of the time that is not the case.

There's almost always someone in a worse place than you. A couple years after my divorce I met a young, troubled man who'd gotten connected with our church. He was 18 or so, had gotten kicked out of his house, had some history of problems with drugs, and had the scars to prove he'd tried to kill himself. I decided to take him to lunch once a week at a local diner to talk to him. That was it. No getting too deeply pulled into his problems, which I was poorly equipped to deal with, but just to try to provide positive companionship and connection. One day he was upset because, he claimed, the TV crews had come to his door trying to interview him. That sounded bogus to me, so I asked why they'd done that. He said they wanted to talk to him about his dad getting out of jail and that his dad was a super-famous murderer known statewide as the Such and Such Killer. I went home and googled that, and wouldn't you know, that killer was being released from prison and his last name was the same as this kid's. Whatever problems I had, they were nothing like his.

Again, we have to guard against getting pulled into other people's dysfunction. But just spending time with others in need, who are often very lonely themselves, will turn us away from ourselves and towards others, put our own problems in perspective, and help us realize how difficult it actually is to help someone going through a major struggle.

6. Know that while in the short term women tend to recover better from divorce than men, over time this may reverse. For whatever reason, women seem to move on from a divorce faster than men. Just ask yourself, for example, how many "divorce parties" you know of that have been thrown by men vs. women. I've never met a man who celebrated his divorce (at least not until long after the fact). And because women are typically the one filing for divorce, they do it at a time that is convenient for them, not necessarily for you. It's often quite a bad time for you, as I noted above.

Longer term, divorce is rarely turns out to be as a great deal for women as they think. Books like *Eat, Pray, Love* – at least for a while a staple of women leaving their husbands – fill their heads with the possibilities of the future. The media loves to extol this, [creating myths](#) such as the "cougar" (an older woman who dates much younger men) that sell them on the idea that life will be better after they divorce their husbands.

Sometimes, women who divorce their husbands do hit the jackpot. One woman in my network divorced her husband and got remarried to a wealthy man. She's seems to be living the dream.

More often, it doesn't work out that way. Women are [less likely](#) than men to remarry. For people over the age of 35, other dynamics come into play like the fact that large age gaps in marriage are more likely. Remarried couples on average have a larger age gap than first marriage couples. Men are more likely to marry someone younger than their ex-wife, for example. According to [Pew Research](#):

Not only are men who have recently remarried more likely than those beginning a first marriage to have a spouse who is younger; in many cases, she is much younger. Some 20% of men who are newly remarried have a wife who is at least 10 years their junior, and another 18% married a woman who is 6-9 years younger. By comparison, just 5% of newlywed men in their first marriage have a spouse who is 10 years younger, and 10% married a woman who is 6-9 years younger.

So once you recover from your divorce and want to remarry, there's real chance you could marry someone much younger than the ex-wife who left you. Keep in mind though that larger age gaps, like second marriages themselves, have a [higher risk](#) of divorce.

Also, though she might have ended up keeping most of your shared friends, as above, over time, people who are single (including divorced) and those who are married tend to bifurcate into separate social circles. She may well have already migrated towards a new friend set of divorced women before leaving you, but don't be surprised if she ends up drifting further and further apart from the married couples you all used to hang out with, even if she seems to remain close friends with the wives in the short term.

And even if your ex-wife got custody of the kids and child support, single motherhood is still tough. Think about a single mother [right now](#) during the coronavirus shutdowns trying to work from home without any childcare.

I'm not telling you to wish ill to befall your ex-wife or that you should celebrate if it does. In fact, don't do that. But early in a divorce it can seem like she got you, she won, she's coming out clearly on top, which can fuel a sense of bitterness. This isn't always the case, of course. But if it is in yours, just remember that things might look very, very different five or ten years down the road.

7. Rebound relationships are almost certain to be a disaster. I'm sure you know this already but it bears repeating. What woman is likely to be attracted to a man who is just divorced or even still going through the divorce process? Think about it. Also, you are (or will be) in an emotionally vulnerable place that clouds your own judgment.

The challenge here is that you're unfortunately more likely to have a woman willing to lend a sympathetic ear to you than you are male friends. When you are really hurting, this can be nearly impossible to resist.

I've never heard of a rebound relationship turning out well for either party. It may be best to simply avoid engaging in any one-on-one relationship with a non-female relative for a significant period of time. (See also [Masc #25](#)). If you do choose to enter such a relationship, just realize you are playing with fire.

8. Hold on to your faith. Divorce has two primary effects with regards to faith depending on the individual. The first is to send non-Christians to Christianity, similar to how other "hitting rock bottom" experiences do. This was the case for me.

For those who were already Christian, divorce can be a crisis of faith as in the email above. Divorce was not that for me, but after becoming a Christian my life went straight downhill for three straight years that included a series of bizarre experiences I still cannot explain. I remember thinking to myself in that time that I could not in good conscience ever recommend that someone become a Christian.

I'm not the biggest fan of Oswald Chambers, but out of that experience I've come to consider one of his his lines perhaps the most profound truth outside of the Bible: "Some extraordinary thing happens to a man who holds on to the love of God when the odds are against God's character."

Personal suffering and tragedy like divorce calls into question the character of God, particularly when it frequently seems to be meaningless. This is when the problem of evil gets personal.

Just remember that you are in good company. Jeremiah lamented that God had deceived him, for example. The scriptures are full of people wrestling with God over the toughest issues. The entire book of Job is famously dedicated to it.

I am firmly convinced that if you hold on to your faith through this crisis you will never regret it. I can't give you any logical proof nor make big promises about how your life will be so amazing in the future the way Job's ended up.

What I can say is that the Bible is full of promises about God's faithfulness. "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed," for example. I've seen that in my own life. And I've seen it in everyone else who has trusted in God during times God's character is in question.

My strongest encouragement would be to continue putting your trust in God. Nothing else is more important.

I hope you found these points helpful. Divorce is terrible, there's no two ways about it. Even if doesn't cause you a lot of problems or if you come out on the other side in a sense better for it, I hope that you will never view your divorce as a good thing. But I do hope you come through stronger, wiser, and more sanctified on the other side.

If you have been divorced or have personally helped a friend through a divorce and have practical tips to share, please [send them to me](#). I will review and share with everyone in a future installment as appropriate.

Noteworthy

Randi Gunther: [Why Great Husbands Are Being Abandoned](#) - Husbands are happy with more equality. Wives are still divorcing them (from 2014)

You would think that the women in these new relationships would be ecstatic. They've got a guy who wants to work out together, share parenting, support their parallel dreams, and make their family collective central to both of their lives. They've established an equal relationship of coordinated teamwork, and the guys don't seem to miss their old need to posture for power over intimate connections. Well, guess again. Fifty percent of marriages are still ending in divorce, and women continue to be the gender that initiates those endings. In the past, their reasons for leaving most often had to do with infidelity, neglect, or abuse. Now they're dumping men who are faithful, attentive, and respectful, the very men they said they have always wanted.

WSJ: [U.S. Marriage Rate Plunges to Lowest Level on Record](#)

A chart of marriage rates in the US from 1900-2018 (via [CDC](#)):



Steven Wedgworth: [Your Family Is the Frontlines](#)

Former Christianity Today editor Mark Galli's newsletter the [Galli Report](#) is a great weekly roundup of observations and articles that caught his eye. I recommend checking it out and subscribing.

Please don't forget to support the Masculinist on [Patreon](#) or [Gumroad](#) (or to PayPal contributions to <https://paypal.me/masculinist>).

Coda

I see no point in bishops or preachers or Christian evangelists just recycling the kind of stuff that you can get from any soft-left liberal because everyone is giving that. If I want that, I'll get it from a Liberal Democrat councilor. If you're a

Christian, you think that the entire fabric of the cosmos was ruptured when by this strange singularity where someone who is a God and a man sets everything on its head. To say it's supernatural is to downplay it. I mean this is a massive singularity at the heart of things. And if you don't believe that, it seems to me you're not really a confessional Christian. You may be a cultural Christian, but you're not a confessional Christian. So if you believe that, it should be possible to dwell on all the other weird stuff that traditionally comes as part of the Christian package. It seems to me that there's a deep anxiety about that, almost a sense of embarrassment...If it's to be preached as something true, the strangeness of it, the way that it can't be framed by what seems to be mere reality, has to be fundamental to it. I don't want to hear what bishops think about Brexit; I know what they think about Brexit, and it's not particularly interesting.

- Tom Holland, "[How Christianity Gained Dominion](#)" (interview)

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