



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 30, 2014

Research Challenges “50 Percent” Divorce Statistics for Christians

A new book by a Harvard-trained researcher is challenging the notion that up to half of all Christian marriages end in divorce.

Shaunti Feldhahn, a researcher who authors Christian-based books on marriage, said the oft-quoted statistic that half of all marriages in America end in divorce — including among Christian couples — is just plain false. Feldhahn, who conducted eight years of research on the issue, said the truth is that just over 30 percent of all marriages in America end in divorce, and for couples who regularly attend church the rate plummets to between 15 and 20 percent — still troubling numbers, but much better than the discouraging statistics that have been quoted for the past several years.



Feldhahn, whose research on the subject is contained in her book [The Good News About Marriage](#), admitted to [CBN News](#) that she was guilty of spouting the “50 percent” statistic until she began to wonder where the figure actually came from. When she and assistant Tally Whitehead began digging into the research, they realized that “there is no such thing as a 50 percent divorce rate. It’s never been close.” She said that present statistics indicate that “72 percent of people are still married to their first spouse — that’s Census Bureau data.”

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Feldhahn speculates that the “50 percent” statistic came from a number of predictions made by researchers and experts based on the trajectory of past divorce rates. But the projections were “too pessimistic,” she said. “Starting in the 1970s — that’s when those projections started — when no-fault divorce started, the divorce rate skyrocketed. Suddenly there was this explosion in divorce.” But it is a rate that has steadily fallen over the years.

Some experts argue that the pessimistic numbers concerning marriage may have contributed to a “why try” fatalistic attitude that has had some couples projecting that their marriage will fail, and assuming that not even a strong Christian faith will help. According to one Christian counselor, Angel Davis, the negative numbers almost serve as permission for couples to give up. “When you have a statistic like 50 percent, it gives you the option,” Davis told CBN News. “It becomes an option in your mind.”

For many pastors, priests, and other Christian leaders whose job it is to give hope and encouragement to couples and families, the phony numbers have made for a discouraging hurdle. “For a pastor it means that ‘all my work doesn’t mean very much,’” Feldhahn pointed out to CBN. And for “the average person in the congregation there’s this subtle feeling like, ‘If that’s true, if on something as important as marriage, doing what the Bible says doesn’t change anything, what does that mean about the



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Bible?”

But the truth is that following one’s faith and regularly attending church are powerful antidotes against divorce. In fact, noted Feldhahn in a recent commentary published by the [Christian Post](#), “researchers who have looked at actual actions of faith ... have found average divorce rates plummet by 25 to 50 percent when someone actually attends church regularly.” She added that “people who actually go to church regularly not only protect their marriages from divorce — they enjoy each other more, and have much happier marriages! It may seem like such a little thing, but it turns out that plugging into a church community is one of the most important things you can ever do for your marriage.”

She explained that one of the most important correlations between going to church and a successful marriage is that “church attendance simply helps a couple look to God first and foremost in their relationship, which is vital for the selflessness and forgiveness necessary for any marriage.”

She added, however, that “there’s another factor that is often overlooked — and it has implications for what sort of church attendance matters. Much research has confirmed that becoming part of a supportive, encouraging community, seeing friends regularly, sharing life together, and having people to turn to for advice can often do informally and quickly what many couples outside of church communities might have to pay professional therapists to do over the course of many years.”

Feldhahn told CBN that there are other things that couples can do to divorce-proof their marriage, including to resist the temptation — validated by the secular culture — to live together before getting married. “People who decide not to live together before they get married, that has been proven to have a really good effect on the marriage,” she said, noting that couples who don’t co-habitate before marriage have a divorce rate that is as low as five percent.



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