



Restoring and Strengthening the American Family

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

The future the nation depends on the strength of families, requiring the restoration of marriage

Restoring family life requires arguing that marriage is valuable, accessible and indispensable.

Restoring marriage requires a cultural commitment from each cultural sphere - religion, education, entertainment, and government.

The future of this nation will depend on the strength of its families, measured largely by the restoration of marriage as the cornerstone of American family life.

How do we accomplish such a tall task? By making the case to the current and future generations that marriage is valuable, desirable, accessible, and indispensable for the purpose of family formation. Put simply, we need to embark on a “marriage before carriage” campaign that is infused in every part of our culture.

But Before we get into details, let’s first do a little etymological work. One of the origins of the word “culture” is the Latin word “cultura” (Cool-tu-ra), which is an agricultural term related to tilling land and the intentional preparation of the earth for fruitful activity.

What holds true in the agricultural realm also holds true in the sociocultural realm. When it comes to creating a marriage and family culture in America, we need to be mindful about the current conditions of our

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social soil and intentional about planting and watering those things we hope to grow and weeding and pruning anything that threatens our harvest.

Marriage has been under attack for decades from actors who have sought to change its definition and weaken its foundations through politics and policy, media, academia, and social norms.

Therefore, if we want to strengthen the family and fortify the home, we need to get our houses in order. I am going to speak to you briefly about four “houses”—the church house, the school house, the movie house, and the state house—that represent four distinct—yet interrelated—aspects of culture, namely religion, education, media, and government.

Religion (Church house)

I am sure everyone here is familiar with the idea that “politics is downstream from culture.” Well, I would argue that culture—specifically the beliefs and values that shape behavior—is downstream from religion.

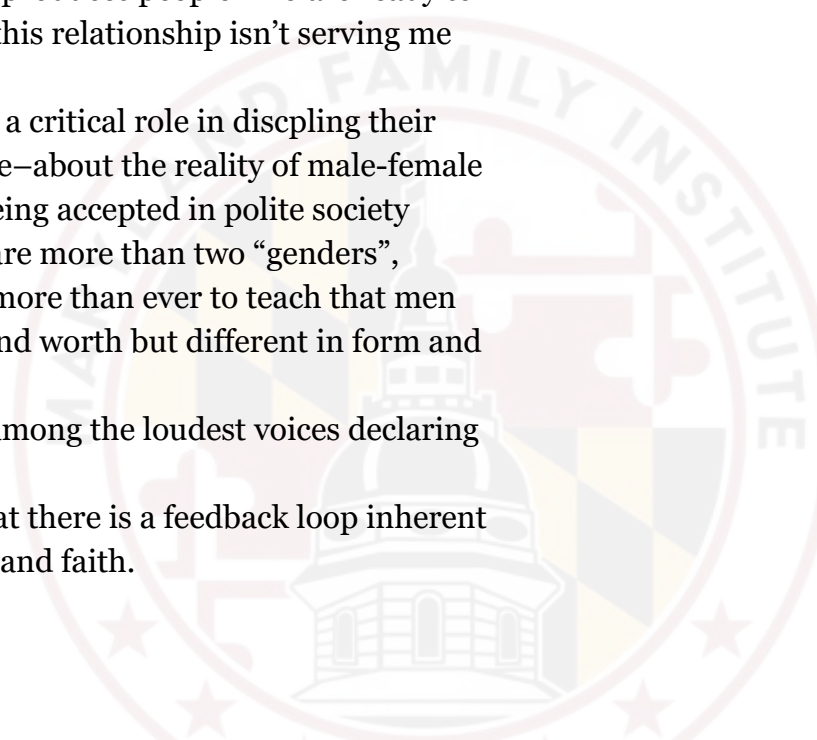
Unfortunately, 30% of Americans are now religiously unaffiliated. Religion provides a moral foundation, a lens through which people view the world, and boundaries that govern our behavior.

A decline in the importance of religion is one reason marriage is seen as a temporary contract as opposed to a lifelong covenant. Christianity calls believers to do hard things—including enduring persecution—for the sake of the faith. But an irreligious culture that prioritizes convenience over duty produces people who are ready to divorce the moment they think, “this relationship isn’t serving me anymore.”

Religious institutions also play a critical role in discipling their members—and the broader culture—about the reality of male-female sex differences. At a time when being accepted in polite society requires you to affirm that there are more than two “genders”, religious institutions are needed more than ever to teach that men and women are equal in dignity and worth but different in form and function.

Pastors and priests should be among the loudest voices declaring that androgyny is not equality.

It is also important to know that there is a feedback loop inherent in the interaction between family and faith.



A recent nationwide survey of 19,000 churchgoers from the nonprofit Communio found that 80% of respondents had continuously married parents through childhood. Obviously correlation does not equal causation, but the authors of this project noted prior research has shown that the break-up of the family through divorce often produces religious non-affiliation among the children.

Education (School house)

One way to cultivate a pro-marriage society is to introduce K-12 students to the “success sequence”. For those of you who are unfamiliar, the "success sequence" refers to research that shows 97 percent of Millennials born between 1980 and 1984 who finish school, secure employment, and marry before having children are not poor by their mid-30s.

That message is tangible, achievable, and measurable. It is also something that can be introduced to children long before they make the decision to start a family.

This is more important now than ever before because the left is open about its desire to use the classroom for the type of political indoctrination that makes creating a marriage culture very difficult.

Here is an official statement from New York City Mayor Eric Adams on the Drag Queen Story Hour NYC program:

“At a time when our LGBTQ+ communities are under increased attack across this country, we must use our education system to educate. The goal is not only for our children to be academically smart, but also emotionally intelligent. Drag storytellers, and the libraries and schools that support them, are advancing a love of diversity, personal expression, and literacy that is core to what our city embraces.”

Adams oversees the largest public school system in the country. There are over 1.1 million students in New York City.

I was one of them. I can assure you that I did not suffer academically because I graduated before the city began using drag queens as literacy coaches. This is why education choice, specifically through education savings accounts, is so important. Choice gives parents the ability to find schools that have high standards and align with their values. Home education is also a key component of getting the school house in order.

It also serves to reinforce the home's telos as a hub of productive economic, spiritual, social, educational, and relational activity.

Education is equal parts scholarship and discipleship—academic mastery and moral formation. It is not a neutral endeavor. The only question is whose values will be planted in the minds of the next generation.

Media and entertainment (Movie house)

Television, film, social media, digital media, and advertising are also important tools for cultivation. We need more positive images of intact American families, with fathers who love and lead their families, wives who respect and support their husbands, and children who honor their parents.

I understand those types of shows are unlikely to spring up when what we have been planting for decades are bumbling, incompetent fathers, disrespectful children, and reality television that showcases drama between wine moms.

That said, conservatives need to continue engaging online and through new media platforms, especially if we want to reach the next generation who are being targeted by both the anti-family feminist left as well as the anti-marriage “red-pill” right. The latter is fueled by men who tell other men they should rethink their approach to marriage, children, and family in a society where women have more economic, political, legal, and cultural power than ever before.

But what young men need to know is that marriage and children give them both something to live—and die—for. They should not fear forming a family. They should embrace marriage as man's natural habitat and see the important role they play in establishing the social infrastructure for multi-generational success.

But media in this case is not restricted to movies, tv shows, and podcasts.

Any municipal government in the country could choose to take a portion of its human services or child welfare budget and direct it toward a pro-marriage public awareness campaign. They can have a simple message like: “Give her a ring before she gives you a baby” or “In this city we believe marriage comes before carriage.”

This type of effort could be even more effective if every corporation, small business, professional sports league, entertainer, and athlete promoted marriage the way they promoted “social justice”, particularly since 2020.

Government (Statehouse)

Conservatives and libertarians are increasingly making a public case for policies designed to strengthen families. Some have pushed for paid parental leave, reforms to the WIC program, and expanding the Child Tax Credit.

Family policies that are solely child-focused are well-intentioned, but have limited effect without a specific focus on marriage. Yes, it is good to focus the energies of a mother and father on the needs of their shared child. But marriage also accounts for the duties and obligations husbands and wives have toward one another. The pledge of commitment “in sickness and in health” is not part of any cohabitation agreement, child support order, or divorce decree I am aware of.

A new era of conservatism with regard to the most important institution may require us to choose whether programs that don't deliver our desired results 90% of the time are worthwhile investments. I know the Bush administration tried something similar in the early 2000s with its Supporting Healthy Marriage Project. According to the evaluation published in 2012, the marriage education programs that were funded in several sites across the country produced a consistent pattern of small positive effects on multiple aspects of couples' relationships.

But imagine a program, funded by the local government with matching funds from a large foundation that provides relationship education training for unmarried couples with children.

The program would be administered through a nonprofit organization with support from local faith-based institutions. It would need to address finances, communication, sex and fidelity, substance abuse, conflict, etc.

Couples who successfully complete the program would have their marriage license fees waived and be eligible for a mass wedding event at a large local venue. But they would also receive a significant monetary incentive—let's say \$10,000—in the form of a loan that would turn into a grant after seven years.

What if a study done in 15 years shows that only 33% of the couples who started are still married.

Would you consider that a failure? If so, perhaps we should rethink how we define success.

Consider this, a 330 lifetime batting average would make someone one of the best hitters in MLB history. But a 35% free throw percentage is terrible.

My point? Defining success must be done in the context of the game being played. Marriage cultivation work with low-income couples who don't have a family history of marriage and who have already dealt with infidelity is going to look different than the same work being done with middle-class, churchgoing couples.

The success sequence is good for students, but with 40% of American births occurring outside of marriage and 35% of all unmarried parents now cohabiting, we need a cultivation strategy that includes repair and restoration, not just rhetoric.

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