

# COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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## Single Parenting

The struggle to be a successful parent is a very difficult task for any two-parent home, however, when a parent is alone this adds even more stress and difficulty to the job. Single parenting is extremely difficult, because you have double the responsibility with half the resources. In my opinion there is no responsibility more difficult than single parenting. I grew up in a single parent home and watched my mother struggle with all the responsibilities she had, and so today I have great respect for this difficult job.

However, one of the best things that you, as a single parent, have going for you, is that the God of heaven is watching over you and wants to help you. The Lord makes His care so clear when He says, *"The Lord watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow"* (Ps. 146:9). The word *relieves* in this verse means that God will come to aid, sustain, and hold you up. This means He will be your aid and the arm who will hold you up throughout your responsibility as a parent.

In addition, God commands all of His people to aid and support you. The Lord commands, *"Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow"* (Isa. 1:17). If you are not a single parent reading this article, please understand your responsibility to the single parents that you know. Ask God to show you how you can do good, defend, and help this single parent family.

God also revealed His careful watching over the fatherless when He sent Elijah to the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:9). Why did He do that? I believe it was simply because He wanted to show that He truly cared about the plight of this mother. Jesus also spoke about this widow in the New Testament to show His equal concern for single parents (Luke 4:26). Therefore, never doubt that your

heavenly Father knows your needs, and that He cares for you!

### What are the struggles of a single parent, and some possible solutions?

**1. Dealing with the past.** It doesn't matter how you became a single parent, whether by divorce or having a child before you were married, the result is always the same. When you are in the midst of one of those difficult days, when you are overwhelmed by the circumstances of life, the anger, resentment, fear, guilt, hopelessness, and/or self-pity are going to surface. You start playing the 'what if' game in your mind. What if I would not have married him or her? What if I never started dating him or her? What if I would have tried harder in the relationship? What if my present circumstances never get better? These thoughts and feelings can cause an over-all depression that will drain you of hope. If these issues go unresolved it will greatly affect your ability to parent effectively. What can you do to resolve these issues?



### Assure your child of your love for them!

I would encourage you to begin by getting some personal counseling from your pastor or an elder in your church. You need to resolve these issues of guilt, resentment and hopelessness. Let someone know you need some help. Find out what God's Word has to say about your personal struggles. Remember, *"Where there is no*

*counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety"* (Prov. 11:14). In addition, I have written a book entitled; *"Winning Your Personal Battles"* that would greatly help you resolve these issues. You can view the topics addressed at our website: [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org)

**2. Loneliness.** Whenever you have the sole responsibility to care for children every day by yourself, this many times results in a lack of contact with other adults. This lack of adult conversation can cause a sense of isolation and loneliness. Even if you work at a job outside the home, there are still only children to talk with when you return home. If you are struggling with the previous issues of anger, guilt, and hopelessness, then many times you will not even want to be around people, which results in further isolation in your life. How can you address this issue in your life?

I would suggest that you purpose in your heart not to isolate yourself by going to church regularly, having other single parents over to your home, and scheduling recreation with other single, and married adults with children (Prov. 18:1). As you seek out other single adult friendships, the result will be that you will find you are not alone. Just make sure that these friendships are spiritually edifying to you. Paul taught that we should *"Comfort each other and edify one another"* (1 Thess. 5:11). Friendships like this are what will build you up. Finding godly friendship and fellowship will be just the encouragement you need. Consider determining which children your child likes to play with in his or her Sunday school class. This would be the best place to begin your search for your friends. These friends could also be a possibility for each of you to trade babysitting, so you can both have some adult time with others.

**3. Trying to be both parents.** Many times I have sat in counseling with a single parent who explains to me their battle with trying to be both a mother and father to their child. I try to explain to them that

**"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14**

this is an impossible task. You are only one person with only so much time and only certain gifts and abilities. A mother cannot teach her son about working on cars if she is not mechanical, any more than a father can give his daughter tips on how to put on make-up. You must recognize the fact that there are only certain needs that you can fulfill and that you need help.

You need to realize and accept the fact that you cannot do it all. The best thing to do is look for others who can substitute for your mate and give the counsel and help needed in those specific areas. Pool your resources with other single parents to supply these needs. This again requires you to not isolate yourself and to find those friends where this can take place. I remember men who were friends or coworkers of my mother, who would come camping with us. They taught me how to fish. Those were good memories, and I made friendships that lasted for years. Don't miss these opportunities for your children.

**4. Loss of time.** The struggle of the loss of time when your children don't live with you is a difficult one. Sometimes you live a great distance from them because of work, and other times it is a custody issue. No matter what the reason, the loss of time with your children can be one of the most heart wrenching dilemmas of divorce. You not only lose your spouse, but you also lose precious time with your children.

Sometimes there is no solution, but you must take every opportunity possible to get as much time with them as you can. If possible, live as close geographically to your children as you can. This enables you to be at their school or sports functions, even if it is not your time to have them. Phone them a couple of times a week to say hi and check on how they are doing. You can send notes to just say you love them, and to let them know what you are doing as well. Find hobbies you can do with them when they come over to your house. Make sure they have your phone number during working hours, and the assurance that you are available if they are in need. If you live far from your children, use a video calling system so that you can see and talk with them.

**5. Financial pressure.** When death or divorce removes the source of income to the family, things can become extremely difficult, which adds more stress to single parenting. This new source of pressure on

you can result in the buildup of anger and depression in your heart, because you see important needs left unmet.

Here are several solutions you should consider that may enable you to reduce your expenses. Seek out another single parent, or single person, to move in with you to help cut your housing costs. Think about moving closer to where you work to reduce transportation costs. Set up a budget to control your spending. If you have never set up a budget, there are many online sources that can give you great counsel on how to do this. Remember, you need to manage all your resources well, which may require you to cut out other things (Prov. 21:5). Establish clear priorities of what is an essential need as opposed to what your desires are. Beware of getting into debt with credit cards. Debt only adds more financial pressure (Prov. 22:7). Encourage your children to get after school jobs (lawn mowing, baby-sitting). This teaches them a good work ethic, gives them responsibility, and allows them to have some money of their own.

## Co-Parenting Struggles and Solutions

**1. No agreement.** When you do not agree with your former spouse on their parenting decisions or their parenting style, this can cause great problems in your attempt to parent. This many times creates a tug of war between the parents, and the children end up in the middle. How can you handle these issues?

I usually suggest to parents to try several things. First, without an angry or confrontational attitude, call or sit down with your former spouse and try to solve these issues (James 1:20; Matt. 5:25). This is what the Bible encourages us to do. Focus the conversation not on your anger, but on the confusion these contrary decisions cause the children. Emphasize that they are the losers in this battle between you. Seek common ground or a compromise. Remember, it isn't going to be all your way. Stress what is in the best interest of the children, not who is right.

If this doesn't work, or you cannot find any agreement, then ask your pastor or marriage counselor to be a neutral third party. Hopefully, a third party's influence and ideas will help you find a compromise. Remember, a compromise means both parents must sacrifice something. If

this option fails, then your only option will be court ordered mediation.

**2. Dealing with children who are angry or guilty over your divorce.** Anger and guilt are a very common experience in most homes where divorce has occurred. As a parent you must realize that children can read your attitude very well. If you are expressing anger or guilt, your children will pick up on this, which can lead to separation between you and your child. Or, because of your child's lack of ability to understand what has occurred in the marriage, it will cause many children to think, *If I were only better, my parents would not have divorced!* How do you handle this?

First as a parent, deal with your own anger and guilt with your pastor or counselor. If you don't address these emotions, they can be very destructive to your spiritual life, and to all your other relationships, including your relationship with your children. If you have no one to talk to about your anger or guilt, please read the chapters I have written in my book, *"Winning Your Personal Battles"* regarding these issues.

Second, confirm to your children that they are not to blame for anything that has happened in your marriage. Assure them that this was a problem between mom and dad, and has nothing to do with them. Explain that they cannot fully understand what has happened now, but they will when they are older. At this moment they *"understand as a child"* (1 Cor. 13:11). Remember, with young children, the less detail you get into with them the better. The most important thing is to simply assure your children of your love for them (John 15:9). Tell your former spouse about this problem in your child's thinking, so he or she can also confirm the same truths to the child. Encourage your children to forgive if they are holding resentment. Get counseling on how to encourage them to forgive. You must talk to them honestly and directly about these issues. Do not let their anger or guilt go unresolved within them. Get it out in the open and talk about it.

**3. Failing to discipline.** Many parents go through this struggle when there has been a bitter divorce. There has been so much conflict in the home that the divorced parent doesn't want to create more conflict. You also think that if you discipline your children, you might lose them to your former spouse, who doesn't discipline. Many times, an older child will even

threaten the parent with the possibility of moving to live with the other parent, in the heat of a conflict. Sometimes this is a bluff to get his or her own way. Other times they are sincere in their threat, because they think it will be easier with your former spouse.

To address this problem, first be sure your discipline is fair and based in sincere love. Remember the basic goals of parenting and discipline that God has called you to. You can refer to these topics in other parts of this series on parenting. If possible, ask your former spouse to back you up in your discipline. Ask your former spouse to verbally confirm that these are the same rules in his or her house as well. This will hopefully allow you and your former spouse to have a united front.

**4. Failing to have devotions.** With all the pressures of your work, your child's homework, daily chores, cooking, and laundry, devotional time to teach spiritual truth falls by the wayside. For the Christian parent, this only creates more guilt and frustration. How can you resolve this issue?

Begin by dividing up the chores among all the children according to their age and ability. By sharing these family household duties it keeps you from having to do everything yourself. Establishing each child's responsibility is best done through a meeting, where you explain the need to pull together as a family. When household duties are shared like this, it enables you to have more free time to think about and prepare a devotional topic to share with them. I usually suggest to single parents to not try to do devotions every day at first. Begin with once or twice a week and add additional times as you can. Also, remember the best time for devotions is while they are eating breakfast or dinner, or at bedtime for very small children. Why is this? Usually, teaching devotionals get left until the end of the day. Breakfast or dinner is the best time for devotions, because you are together, and it only takes a few minutes if you are willing to forgo your breakfast or dinner for a few minutes. Meal time is always best, because they want to be there, which means they are a captive audience. In addition, they aren't talking because their mouths are full. Take a truth that God has

shown you from your own time of reading the Scripture, and apply it to their lives.

## Where can you find help as a single parent?

**1. Your own family.** Your family should be your primary helpers (brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents). They have a personal knowledge of your needs because of their continual contact with you. Also, they will usually have a genuine love and concern for your children. Do not be shy about letting them know about your needs, because this is what families are supposed to do; help each other (1 Tim. 5:8). Unfortunately, sometimes there is a geographical distance from your family that makes their help impossible. If this is the case, you should consider the possibility of moving nearer to family members. If you have a single sibling that could move in with you, they could be an even greater support. This is what happened in my own home when my parents got a divorce. My aunt came to live with us and provided enormous support for my mother.

**2. Your close friends.** Your friends are another valuable source of help and support. Your friends are those who love and care about you, so don't be shy about asking for support. The Bible is clear about the importance of friends (Prov. 17:17; Prov. 18:24).

**3. Your church family.** The pastors in your church family are also a great source of help, counsel, and encouragement. There will be times when you are going to get discouraged and possibly overwhelmed. This is what your church family is all about. If you have a singles ministry at your church, they also can be a support and resource for help. When there are emergencies or bills you can't pay, and your family is unable or unwilling to help, the church should be that help you need. Note what the Scripture teaches on this topic (1 Tim. 5:16; Acts 6:1-5).

**4. Other single parents or couples.** If you have established friendships with two-parent families or other single parents, tap into their gifts and abilities. Let them also know where you could serve or be of help to them (Matt. 7:12). This is what the family of God is all about! This is also another reason why you should not isolate yourself from the Body of Christ.

**5. The government.** Another source of help is the government. When your

spouse has left you with nothing, the government can also help you with financial assistance, low cost housing, medical aid, and even job training. There is no reason why you should not use these services if you are in need. You, your friends, and your family have been paying taxes for years to provide for this assistance. Paul appealed to the power of the Roman government to protect him from the physical harm the Jews had planned for him (Acts 25:11). Paul also taught that the government authorities were ministers of God to you for good (Rom. 13:1-4).

Each of these options for finding help are good. Don't be reluctant in seeking this help. Always seek this help in the priority given here. This is the biblical model.

## Critical Concerns!

**1. Keep Christ first in your life.** If you want to be successful as a parent, remember this principle: "*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*" (Matt. 6:33). If you seek Him first, He will be found by you. He will provide and guide you through whatever comes your way. Keep your focus off of yourself and on Him (Heb. 12:2). Remember, you can't lead your children into the kingdom if you aren't headed there yourself.

**2. Keep your children as your primary ministry concern.** Paul taught that we should first show piety or godliness at home (1 Tim. 5:4; 8). Be careful not to become overly committed to ministry or service at church to the point that you neglect your own children's needs. They are your first priority.

**3. Ask God for contentment.** Paul taught that contentment is what he learned while he was in prison after being forsaken and betrayed by several of his friends (Phil. 4:11-13). This is a great secret for a single parent. Accept the reality of your present circumstances. Seek God's grace to enable you to endure your present hardships. Find His strength to do what is set before you each day. Do your best and commit the rest into His hands.

**4. Do not believe your children are doomed to grow up emotionally damaged just because they live in a single parent home.** This thought is a lie. If you are loving and caring to your children, teaching and disciplining them to the best of your ability, God will support you and your children. God will not abandon you.

He is “*The Father of the fatherless, a defender of widows*” (Ps. 68:5). The word *defender* means one who will come to your aid. This means He will always be with you and help you in your parenting responsibility. Remember, that many great men and women of God grew up without any parents or were raised by foster parents in very adverse situations. Esther was raised by Mordecai after her parents died (Esther 2:7). Moses was raised in Pharaoh’s house, and yet became God’s prophet to the nation of Israel (Ex. 2:10). Joash, at the age of seven, became king over Israel after his whole family was murdered. He became a godly man who affected an entire nation for God. Josiah, at age eight years old, also became a great king over Israel. His family was also murdered (2 Chron. 33-35). If all these men and women succeeded in life, so will your children.

**5. You are not a loser just because you have been divorced.** This is also a lie. Even if you were the cause of the divorce, God still has an eternal plan for your life (Eph. 2:10). The Father has known about your life from eternity past. He knows the plans He has established for you, and He will perform them. God will not just forget about His plan for you simply because of one failure in your life. God is a good forgiver; take Him up on His forgiveness. Notice what God said to the nation Israel after they had sinned and rebelled against Him: “*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me, and I will listen to you and you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for me with all your heart*” (Jer. 29:11-13). The bottom line is this: You must believe God wants to bless your life. Quit looking backward and start looking forward (Phil. 3:13).

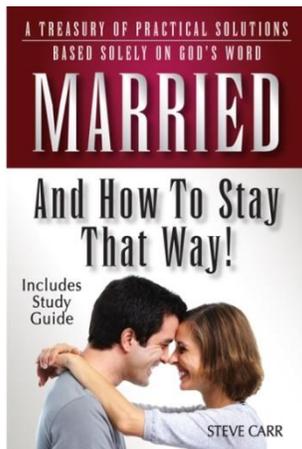
**6. What is next?** If you are considering remarriage in the future, may I suggest several articles and worksheets, that would be very helpful for you to read, so you can count the cost for your children and your life? These articles can all be found under online articles at our website: [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org)

- \* *Understanding Marriage, Divorce, and remarriage*
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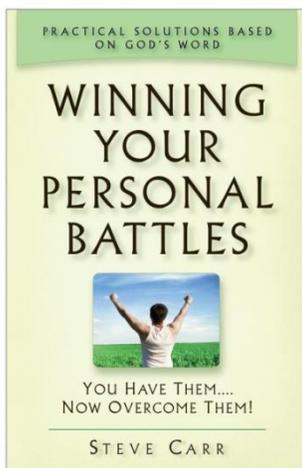
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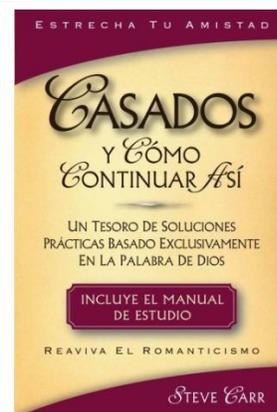
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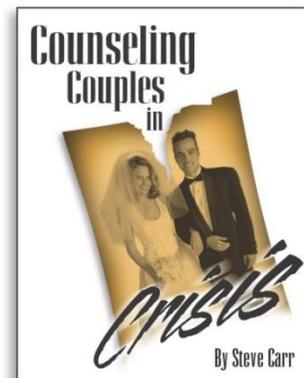
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