

Radical Faith:
The Hard Sayings of Jesus
Part 6: Radical Marriage

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS



A publication of , the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. —Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —Joshua 22:5



Questions for Reflection

- 80% of Americans have some debt (according to credit.com).
80% of Americans don't get enough exercise (according to the Centers for Disease Control).
80% of Americans will get married sometime in their life (according to Pastor Doug).
Which one of those areas of life (finances, fitness, or family) do you think has the **most** power to bless or to bring pain to you and your kids? **Why** do you think that?

In which one of those life areas do you feel most equipped to succeed—and why?

- How significantly, and in what ways, has marriage shaped who you are today?
How significantly, and in what ways, has divorce shaped who you are today?
- Pastor Doug noted that "*Divorce is **always** tragic—even when biblically permitted. The death of a marriage is **never** something that we should celebrate. It is something that we should **mourn**.*" Yet this sentiment is **rarely** heard. **Why** do you think that this observation is not affirmed more often?

How do you think we could say this to our struggling friends—yet without crushing their spirits?

- Good marriages take work—but movies portray "finding your soul-mate" as the key. **Why** is this?
- Have you ever urged someone toward, or away from, divorce? Tell us about it.

In light of what you've learned regarding the biblical teaching on marriage and divorce, how do you now reflect on that?

"Do-overs" aren't possible—but "do-betters" are!
How can you prepare **now**
for your **next** opportunity?

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Application-Challenge

- If you are married—work at it. Be as quick to forgive as you are to ask for forgiveness.
- If you are the guilty party of a divorce—confess your sin to God and receive his forgiveness.

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Sermon Summary

We are in a series of messages where we are looking at some of the hard sayings of Jesus. Today, we are going to look at a hard saying about marriage and divorce. As we do so, we must emphasize two Scriptural truths regarding marriage and divorce. The first is God's grace, and the second is God's plan.

God's Grace for Marriage Marriage is something you must work at. Marital love is not primarily a feeling; it is a commitment to serve the other person, especially when you don't feel like it. It's great when you do feel it, but the marriage isn't over when you don't. The Bible says God hates divorce. He doesn't hate divorced people, but he hates divorce, because of the sin that leads to it and the consequences that flow from it. There's damage to ourselves, there is damage to our spouse, our children, our extended family, and it brings shame on the name of Christ. But here is God's grace: divorce is not the unpardonable sin. You can be divorced and not have committed sin. You can be the one who has been sinned against. But if you have sinned in your divorce, you need to come to God and own it. God will forgive you if you come before him honestly with a repentant heart. You can move on in your life, walking in fellowship with God.

God's Plan for Marriage One man joined together with one woman for a lifetime. That's God's plan. And there are several reasons for that. **First**, God wants to provide companionship for us in marriage (Genesis 2:18). God desires us to be in deep, intimate relationships where we can be real and authentic. The **second** reason for marriage is to promote personal growth. When we get married, our real character is revealed. We might project to other people how we want them to perceive us, but when we live with someone, the real us is revealed, and marriage can allow us to become better. **Third**, marriage is for physical reproduction (Genesis 1:28). But in Ephesians 6:4, we are told that we are also to reproduce spiritually: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." God has given us the home, and he has placed in that home both a male and female, each of which has unique characteristics and unique ways of looking at life. They complement one another.

Marriage is a gift from God. To bless us with companionship and growth, to bless our children, and to bless our world with a clear example of the kind of relationship that God wants to have with us. And because of that Jesus gives us this hard saying today: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matthew 19:3-9). We know that at this time in history, there was a debate going on among the Jews surrounding the topic of divorce. A popular rabbi named Hillel, who lived a few decades before Jesus, had promoted easy or "any cause" divorce.

The Pharisees who were in favor of "any cause" divorce wanted Jesus to weigh in on the subject. That is why in Matthew 19:3 it says that they came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"—the popular Hillel view. Jesus wasn't interested in being drawn into the ongoing debate about the Biblically allowable grounds for divorce. That was the wrong focus. He wanted to establish God's ideal for marriage. That is what we should be most interested in: how to stay married, not end it!

The question was designed to elicit Jesus' position on the popular "any cause" view of divorce. At this point we need to ask, "What is the supposed Biblical basis for 'any cause' divorce?" It is based on a faulty interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1. The Hebrew term translated as "some indecency" in the New American Standard translation is a reference to sexual immorality: adultery, to be specific. Everyone was clear that adultery was a violation of marital vows and therefore a permissible ground for divorce. But Rabbi Hillel found an additional ground for divorce in this verse. It came from the phrase, "finds no favor in his eyes." Rabbi Hillel interpreted this to mean, "for any cause at all." In his rebuttal of this mistaken interpretation, Jesus says, "You are mistaken." The reason for the husband's dissatisfaction in this verse was because his wife was guilty of adultery—that is the "indecent offense" that violated her marital vows.

Now it is important to note that here Jesus is making no comment at all about other possible Biblical grounds for divorce that Moses may have permitted. He is just correcting here the faulty basis for "any cause" divorce. I do not believe that Jesus intended in this single conversation to lay out the entire Biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage. He is correcting what he saw as a dangerous, liberal interpretation that was incredibly injurious of women. He is addressing the faulty Biblical basis for "any cause" divorce. Is divorce ever allowed? The answer is yes. As you survey all the Biblical teaching about divorce and remarriage, there is one clear ground for divorce that nearly everyone is agreed upon: adultery. Even in this case, God's desire is that we extend forgiveness. But when there is ongoing adultery, divorce is permitted. God desires that our marriages last for a lifetime. That therefore, should be every believer's goal.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

Marriage is simple and straight-forward—right? Let's ask some foundational questions and examine a few of our unquestioned assumptions. Here are some questions to get us thinking...

Monday—What constitutes a valid marriage anyway? Since marriage was instituted by God, what role—if any—does the State play in validating a union? How should biblical Christians think about a government which **allows** a **biblically invalid** marriage or **forbids** a **biblically valid** marriage? The Bible never explicitly grants authority over marriage to *either* the church or the secular State, so what role *should* a pastor play in conducting a wedding? Does a wedding have to be conducted publicly? What do you conclude from the following passages?

- Genesis 24 recounts a God-honoring marriage. What elements were and weren't present?
- Ruth 4 recounts another beautiful union. What role did the bride play? The State? The community?

Tuesday—Is cohabitation ever biblically permissible apart from marriage? How can you know if it's God's will for you to get married? How should you decide whom to marry? What is engagement for?

- According to Hebrews 13:4, what does God say is honorable? What does God disallow? According to 2 Timothy 2:22 and Romans 13:14, what response must we make to temptation?
- How to know if you are **designed by God** for marriage: 1 Corinthians 7:1-2, 7-9, 28, 32-39.
- How to know if you are **ready** for to "leave and cleave" (Genesis 2:24): Proverbs 22:24, 29; 10:4.
- Cautions on whom **not** to marry: Jeremiah 17:9; Proverbs 31:30; Judges 14:1-2; 16:4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 *cf.* 1 Corinthians 7:39; (Note: A **profession** of faith is **not** sufficient: Luke 8:13-14; James 2:14-26; 1 John 2:19; Matthew 7:20; Galatians 5:14-23).

Wednesday—What can I do to have a successful marriage? What is the key to a strong marriage? What are the roles and responsibilities of the husband? of the wife? How can I protect my marriage?

- What role does deeply and genuinely knowing God's love play in loving my spouse? 1 John 4:19-20 What does biblical love **do** (and **not** do)? 1 Corinthians 13:4-. What role does prayer play? Ephesians 3:14-19
- Husbands: Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18; Ephesians 5:25-33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7-17.
- Wives: Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18; Ephesians 5:22-24, 31-33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-6, 8-17.
- Protecting a marriage: Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:23-25; Ephesians 4:11-16, 25-27; Proverbs 5-7.

Thursday—Most questions about divorce are **easy** to answer. A divorce **isn't** valid just because...

- "My spouse isn't a Christian" or "I wasn't a Christian when we married." 1 Corinthians 7:12-13
- "We weren't married in a church." Matthew 19:6
- "I need to get out of this marriage for the sake of the kids." 1 Corinthians 7:14
- "We are no longer in love; there is nothing left to our marriage." Ephesians 5:2; Matthew 5:44
- "I married the wrong person; we deserve to be happy." Romans 8:28-30; 1 Peter 2:21
- "My friends tell me I should get out." Psalm 1; Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Peter 4:17-19

Friday—Is a marriage covenant "unbreakable"? If I divorce, am I "still married in God's eyes"?

- Although God hates divorce, and the biblically allowable grounds for divorce are very limited, the marriage covenant is **not** unbreakable. God himself divorced Israel because of adultery (Jeremiah 3:8; Isaiah 50:1; Hosea 2:2).
- Although God hates divorce, and the biblically allowable grounds for divorce are very limited, those who are divorced are no longer in any sense married. Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4 carefully. **However**, although you may no longer be married to your spouse, you may still have obligations to him/her. If you divorced for unbiblical grounds, you are not free to remarry. You must remain single or reconcile with your former spouse (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). And, since the divorce is "real" in God's eyes, one is not free to live with a former spouse **as if** you were married. If you want the privileges of marriage, you must accept the responsibilities of marriage.

Saturday—Is it biblical for a couple to separate without divorcing?

- Mark 10:8-9 makes it clear that we are not to separate what God has joined together. So, we are not to separate unless we have biblical grounds, and intention, to pursue divorce. **What to do?** For this sort of situation God gave you church leaders to help bring resolution. **Please** call on us! Matthew 18:15-20; Hebrews 13:17; Galatians 6:1-2; 2 Timothy 2:25-26.