

The Gospel of Mark

Part 33

Marriage & Divorce

TALKING POINTS WALKING POINTS

Leaders' Guide

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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 or Discussion

- 1** What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you? ...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- 2** *How much* have you been **personally** impacted by divorce?
 insignificantly moderately tragically
- 3** Would you be willing to tell us a bit about it?
- 4** { In what ways—positive and negative—have your views about marriage changed over the years?
 { In what ways—positive and negative—have your views about divorce changed over the years?
- 5** What were the main contributors to changes in your views?
- 6** Pastor Doug made five suggestions for working on our marriages. For each of the suggestions below, look up the passage and discuss how you have, and have not, put this principle into practice.
 1. Consider your spouse to be more important than yourself. [Philippians 2:3; Galatians 5:13]
 2. Don't return an insult with another insult, give a blessing instead. [1 Peter 3:9]
 3. Forgive as God has forgiven you, and don't let the sun go down on your anger. [Matthew 6:12; Ephesians 4:26]
 4. If something is bothering you, bring it up gently. [Matthew 5:23-24; 1 Peter 4:8]
 5. Never presume upon the grace and forgiveness of God. {Romans 6:1-2}
- 7** How can we, as a group, help you "do a little bit better" in one of those areas?

- 1 Standard “starter question”—you know what to do.

- 2 You **want** to know to what degree folks in your group have been impacted by divorce, but this question has the potential to be extremely painful—so proceed with caution! You can “cushion the blow” by saying something like this: “Obviously, divorce is a painful subject for many. But as your Community Group leader, I want to know to what degree each of you have been impacted by divorce. TCC wants to be a place of healing. So I’m wondering **how much** have you been **personally** impacted by divorce? Let’s each take a moment to mark where we personally find ourselves on this continuum. And then, those who are willing, can share a bit about it.”

Note: After those who wish to do so have spoken, you can gently ask, “Anyone else?” and wait a bit. But don’t wait too long. Make sure that its totally OK to not answer this one.

- 3 You’ll notice that this question was folded into the previous one. You decide whether to combine them.

- 4 You probably want to ask these questions together, since almost certainly one’s view of marriage has been shaped by one’s contact with divorce, and vice-versa.

- 5 Again, a potentially very painful question. But on this topic, does a pain-free question even exist?! Just be sensitive—and prayerful.

- 6 You likely will need to “prime the pump”, so be prepared with your own answer to this question. (But wait for others to think and answer. Check your watch—20 seconds feels like an eternity!)

- 7 **Do** lead off with your answer to this one. Be vulnerable and creative in your answer.

Suggestion: Do the “Digging Deeper” exercise before your CG meets. That will both help you with some of your own answers to the previous questions, but also enable you to urge your group members to take time this week to complete that “marriage assessment”. Pastor Dan & Tricia have conducted a “marriage tune-up” with many TCCers. Take a moment to urge any and all to contact me about the possibility. If you sense that someone’s marriage is deeply in danger, appeal to them privately to contact me.

Sermon Summary Mark 10:1-12

There is nothing more important than relationships; they have the greatest potential to bring us joy and fulfillment—or pain and disappointment. The ultimate in relationships is marriage; it is God's idea, not a human construct. So, is divorce ever allowed? If it is, is it then permissible to remarry with God's blessing? Or, what if you're in a second or third marriage and, as you read the Bible, discover that you did not have biblical grounds for divorce—what then? We'll discuss these and other questions today as we study Mark 10:1-12. And as we do, we must consider both God's grace and his plan.

I. God's Grace for Marriage 1 John 1:8-9 teaches that we all sin, and that if we confess our sin, God will forgive and cleanse us. This is true even of the sin of unbiblical divorce. It will be forgiven even if the negative consequences that flow from that sin are not removed. Of course, there are some people who are divorced who did not sin. They didn't want a divorce; they were sinned against when their spouse broke the marriage covenant and was unrepentant. But know this: whenever a divorce takes place, at least one person in that relationship sinned. Someone committed sin that needed to be confessed and repented of. 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. That means that dismissing God's commands about marriage is compassionate neither to those who are considering divorce nor to the next generation who are looking to us as role models.

Marital love primarily is a commitment to serve another person. It's great when the "love feelings" are there, but the marriage isn't over when they're not! As Susan and I reflected on the biblical teaching about marriage and divorce, we decided that for us divorce would not be an option. The Bible says that God hates divorce. He doesn't hate divorced people, but he does hate divorce. When, like us, you have decided that divorce is not an option, you get real creative in problem-solving. You are stuck with that person, and if you don't work on the relationship, you are going to be miserable—and that's great motivation! Begin by considering your spouse to be more important than yourself by actively serving them (Philippians 2:3; Galatians 5:13). Don't return an insult with another insult, give a blessing instead (1 Peter 3:9). Forgive as God has forgiven you (Matthew 6:12). Don't let the sun go down on your anger (Ephesians 4:26). If something is bothering you, bring it up gently (Matthew 5:23-24; 1 Peter 4:8). Deal with your problems—rather than taking them into your next marriage. And never presume upon the grace and forgiveness of God (Romans 6:1-2)!

So, divorce is **not** the unpardonable sin. You may even be the one who was sinned against. But, if you have sinned in your divorce, you need to repent and confess it to God. God will forgive you, if you come before him honestly and with a repentant heart. If you do that, you can move on in your life and walk in fellowship with God and experience his blessing.

II. God's Plan for Marriage One man, joined together with one woman, for a lifetime is God's plan for providing companionship. It also is part of God's plan to promote personal growth. Marriage reveals our real character. You might be able to fool others, but when you share a bathroom with someone, all of a sudden, the real us is revealed! If we determine to work through conflicts, if we choose to let go of our selfishness, then we can learn how to really love others! God also intends marriage for reproduction—physically and spiritually (Ephesians 6:4). The family is God's primary vehicle for discipleship. (TCC has your kids for maybe two hours a week. Church can play a supporting role, but discipleship is the responsibility of parents.) Finally, God designed marriage to be a picture of our relationship with him. It is a visual aid to the world of the kind of relationship God wants to have with his people—a relationship of intimacy, acceptance, grace, fidelity and unconditional love.

But what is the back-story to Jesus' remarks on marriage? In Jesus' day there were two schools of thought on this issue headed by two famous rabbis. Rabbi Shamai taught that divorce was permitted only when there was some kind of extramarital sexual sin involved. Rabbi Hillel taught that anything a wife did to displease her husband constituted legitimate grounds for divorce. Hillel's was the popular view in Jesus's day—but not with

Both rabbis based their views on Deuteronomy 24:1-3. Jesus did not side with Hillel. Divorce is permitted—but it is a divine concession necessitated by the sinful hardness of man’s heart. Jesus wasn’t interested in being drawn into the popular debate—he wanted to establish God’s ideal for marriage. And church—that’s what we should be interested in: how to stay married, not how to end it! Jesus’ emphasis is that marriages ought not be broken. We should do everything we can do to keep our marriages together. Divorce should be very rare.

We must remember that Jesus was responding to the question as it was more fully framed in Matthew 19:3 (“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?”). No, it is not lawful to divorce for just any old reason. Jesus recognized that under certain circumstances, divorce is biblically permitted. Not commanded mind you—but permitted! But adultery does not in and of itself end a marriage. Forgiveness and reconciliation are always possible and, I think, preferable. But Jesus recognized that because of the hardness of men’s hearts, divorce was permitted under certain narrow circumstances like adultery. Jesus rejected the liberal view of Hillel—but that’s exactly the view our culture has taken today. We call it “no fault divorce”. (Now that’s a lie if I’ve ever heard one—when divorce occurs, someone always is at fault!) Divorce never represents God’s ideal; it is a divine concession to human sinfulness. In the church, divorce should be rare, but it’s not. Why is it so prevalent? The answer is obvious: because of our hard hearts. Divorce should never be celebrated. It should be mourned. Our goal shouldn’t be to look for reasons to abandon marriage, but rather to work hard to preserve it, to nourish it. Even in the case of adultery, God’s desire is that we extend forgiveness. But when there is ongoing adultery, divorce is permitted. And where it is permitted there should no shame or guilt attached to the innocent party. Abandonment by an unbelieving spouse is another situation in which divorce and remarriage are permitted (1 Corinthians 7:12–15). I agree with many theologians that extreme cases of neglect and abuse also can be legitimate grounds for divorce, but what I know for sure is that God desires that our marriages last for a lifetime. And because that is God’s desire, it should be our goal. But whenever the Bible permits divorce, remarriage likewise is permitted. Where divorce is forbidden, remarriage is forbidden.

What if you are in a second or third marriage and discover that you did not have biblical grounds for divorce? You have disobeyed God, but what should you do now? Well, you cannot undo what you have done. You certainly shouldn’t divorce your present spouse in an attempt to reconcile with a previous one. But you must repent, confess your sin to God, to your former spouse and to others against whom you’ve sinned. God is gracious; wrongful divorce is not an unforgivable sin. If you are repentant, you can still serve God and others. So, if you are married—work at it. And if you are the guilty party of a divorce—admit your guilt, confess your sin to God, and receive his full and abundant forgiveness.



A writing area consisting of a rounded rectangle with a pencil icon in the top-left corner and ten horizontal lines for writing.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

So, how is your marriage doing? Should you be worried?

Take a moment to rate your marriage according to the following thirty-five biblical standards.

Scale: "never" = 0 "seldom" = 1 "sometimes" = 2 "frequently" = 3 "always" = 4

1. How often does Christ's lordship manifest itself in practical ways in your marriage?
2. How often do you use the Bible to make decisions and determine your actions?
3. How often do you and your spouse study the Bible, pray, worship and serve God?
4. How consistently do you seek to please your spouse above yourself?
5. How consistently do you ask your spouse to forgive you?
6. How often do you extend grace to your spouse when s/he makes a mistake?
7. How often do you verbally express appreciation to your spouse?
8. How often do you verbally communicate with your spouse (exclude texts and e-mails)?
9. How often do you share your opinions, ideas, plans, fears, feelings, joys and problems?
10. How consistently do you understand each other when expressing yourselves?
11. How frequently do you enjoy being involved in common projects together?
12. How consistently do you show love in practical and tangible ways?
13. How often do you give your spouse unexpected gifts and/or attention?
14. Is your conversation consistently pleasant, considerate and friendly?
15. How often do you pray for, support and encourage your spouse?
16. Can you discuss points of disagreement (opinions, politics, etc.) without being irritated?
17. How often do you positively anticipate sexual relations with your spouse?
18. How compatible are your sexual desires?
19. How freely do you discuss your sexual desires with your spouse?
20. How much do you agree about the way money should be spent?
21. Is your spouse as concerned about your views on money as s/he is on his/her own?
22. How consistently do you agree on child-raising decisions?
23. How consistently do your children know that it is foolish to play one of you against the other?
24. How consistently can your spouse trust everything you tell him/her?
25. How often do you honor and appreciate your in-laws?
26. How consistently do you respect your spouse?
27. How often are you glad to introduce your spouse to friends and associates?
28. How consistently do you control your moodiness so that family life is not disrupted?
29. How often do you happily change a habit which displeases your spouse?
30. How consistently do you make your relationship with your spouse your priority?
31. How consistently do you treat your spouse with respect and dignity?
32. How often do you accept corrective criticisms graciously?
33. How consistently do you agree on the roles and responsibilities of husband and wife?
34. How willing are you to accept scriptural solutions to problems without blowing up or crying?
35. How consistently do you maintain the disciplines of Bible study and prayer?

If—without lying!—you scored 95-140, your marriage is biblically solid

If you scored 70-94, your marriage is good, but needs improvement.

If you scored below 70, your marriage is far below the biblical norm.

Improve your marriage!

Get free counseling at:

BiblicalHopeAndHelp@gmail.com