

PREPARATION

Spend the week studying Matthew 19:3-12. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

DETERMINE | which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group

PRAY | for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members and their openness to God's Word.

LANDING POINT | To experience God's best in life we need to submit everything, including our desires and relationships, to Lord Jesus.

◦ Remember the 4 Rules for Small Group Discussion

1. **Confidentiality.** What's said in the group stays in the group.
2. **No cross-talk.** Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.
3. **No fixing.** We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.
4. **Sharing.** Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Mike and Susan recently drove their second son, Jack, across three states to move him into his dorm for college. Their oldest son, Ben, is already married with children. Mike and Susan have been married for twenty-five years. The first years of marriage were exciting and full of life. There's a photo in their den of the two on vacation in Alaska not long after they were married. In the photo Mike's displaying his prize catch after a deep-sea fishing expedition. He's standing there, holding his fish, with a look that's both goofy and proud. Susan remembers him being such a character in those days. Susan's laugh in the photo is genuine to the core. One of Mike's favorite past times was trying to make her laugh. Sometimes they'd laugh together until they couldn't breathe.

While those early years of marriage were wonderful, the hassle-and-bussle of the past decade has made them feel more like business partners than husband and wife. They occupy the same bed, but each of them feels the distance between them widening. Susan's thinking of moving out. She's tired of marriage feeling like a chore. She wants back the kind of relationship they used to have. She wants to

INTRODUCTION [CONT'D]

delight in someone and also be delighted in. She wants to laugh again. She sees that delight in other couples their age. Why not them? What happened? How did they drift so far from one another?

Jesus took both marriage and divorce seriously. And so should we. Whether you're married or single, Jesus gives us hope that we can experience God's best in life. To experience God's best in life we need to submit everything, including our sexuality and relationships, to the Lord Jesus.

Do you relate to anything in Mike and Susan's story? If so, what?

What would be the *NORMAL* thing for Mike and Susan to do? What would be the *WEIRD* thing for them to do?

LEARN

Select 2-3 questions to discuss as a group.

o **God's Intent for Sexuality**

When you read the Gospels, often you find Jesus being challenged by the religious leaders of His day, the Pharisees. In Matthew 19:3-12 the Pharisees ask Jesus if it's lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause. They set a trap for Jesus, hoping He'd incriminate Himself. But Jesus sees through their cunning. Rather than enter a debate about divorce, Jesus focuses on marriage as an institution created by God, which was established in Genesis and intended to last a lifetime.

The Pharisees aren't convinced and ask why Moses commanded divorce. They twist Scripture to make it look like the Mosaic Law justified divorce. Again, Jesus points the Pharisees back to Genesis and God's desire for marriage to last a lifetime. The only reason divorce was allowed under the Law was because of the Israelites' hardness of heart.

Divide the group in pairs. Have each person retell the episode from Matthew 19:3-12 in their own words.

What's Jesus' main point in His encounter with the Pharisees?

What do we learn about marriage, divorce, singleness, and sexuality from the passage?

LIVE

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

Four truths can be gleaned from Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees. Let's take a look at each of them.

◦ Identity

First, your identity comes from God. God is the author of your sexuality. He created you with sexual desires and (for many) the desire to be married. Marriage celebrates the differences between men and women. These gender differences are meant to reflect God's character.

Many people seek identity in their sexuality. However, the Bible shows us that our ultimate identity comes from Christ, not our sexuality, marriage or singleness.

Why do you think so many people seek identity in their sexuality in our culture?

◦ God's plan

The second truth Jesus teaches us is following God's plan is always best. God designed marriage to be a portrait of our union with Him. However, marriage isn't part of God's plan for some. Like marriage, singleness also reflects our relationship with God. Jesus never married. Neither did Paul. Marriage and singleness each challenge and grow us in different ways.

How have marriage and/or singleness grown you in your life? Explain.

◦ A battle to fight

Third, your sinfulness works against God's best. Having a healthy marriage in a fallen world is hard work. The same can be said for being single. Our natural tendency is towards self-centeredness. Doing marriage God's way requires that we act against that tendency and seek God's direction. We must fight against our own hard heartedness to serve our spouse's needs and desires. Unless we are open to God's way, our hearts will harden towards Him and, consequently, our spouse.

Discuss practical ways to fight against selfishness in a marriage and seek God's direction. How should singles engage in this fight?

◦ Surrender

The fourth truth is your sexuality and desires have to be surrendered to Jesus. Whether you're married

LIVE [CONT'D]

or single, Jesus should be Lord over every area of your life. When Jesus doesn't have that position, it's easier to make idols out of sex, marriage and your sexuality. If Jesus does have that position, you will see sex, marriage and your sexuality with greater perspective.

What's one thing you could do this week to give Jesus lordship over your marriage or singleness?

LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

◦ Engaging In Dialogue

The debate is ongoing in our culture regarding sexuality, marriage and gender identity. As God's people, we should not be afraid to engage in dialogue about these issues. However, we should do so with love and understanding. We are supposed to be a people of compassion, who offer true hope only the Gospel can give. Pointing others to the Gospel will help us navigate these hot-button topics. It is possible to stand on God's truth and love those who disagree with us like Jesus did.

Are you comfortable or uncomfortable dialoguing with others about these issues? Explain.

What changes could you make to have a better posture in these kinds of conversations?

PRAY

Thank God for the gift of marriage and its many blessings. Praise Him that Ask God for ways to make your marriage a testimony to the transforming power of the Gospel to others. Consider the many blessings of singleness as well and how God uses it further His Kingdom.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read Ephesians 5 and consider how Paul's words concerning purity, unity and marriage reflect Jesus' in Matthew 19:3-12.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their life.

COMMENTARY

◦ Jesus Draws a Hard Line

While many of the religious elite in 1st century Judaism allowed divorce for a multitude of reasons, Jesus takes a contrary stance in Matthew 19:9: "whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."¹ The Greek word for "sexual immorality" includes a variety of sexual sins not limited to adultery. There's something about sexual infidelity that makes it the only grounds for divorce according to Jesus. Like no other sin, sexual immorality threatens the covenant union between a man and woman. However, Jesus does not make divorce mandatory when there is sexual infidelity. Since Jesus views marriage as a lifelong commitment, Christians should make every effort to reconcile a relationship before seeking a divorce, even if sexual infidelity has occurred.

◦ Marriage reflects the Gospel.

In an excerpt from his book, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*, Pastor Timothy J. Keller writes:

The reason that marriage is so painful and yet wonderful is because it is a reflection of the Gospel, which is painful and wonderful at once. The Gospel is—we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared to believe, and at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. [...] God's saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are and yet also radical, unconditional commitment to us. The merciful commitment strengthens us to see the truth about ourselves and repent. The conviction and repentance moves us to cling to and rest in God's mercy and grace.

The hard times of marriage drive us to experience more of this transforming love of God. But a good marriage will also be a place where we experience more of this kind of transforming love at a human level.²

1. R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version [2015 Edition]* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 1705.

2. Timothy J. Keller, "You Never Marry the Right Person: How Culture Misunderstands Compatibility," *Relevant*, January 5, 2012, 1, accessed September 28, 2016, <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/life/relationship/features/27749-you-never-marry-the-right-person>