

“Jesus on Marriage” // Matthew 19:3–12 // *Forever Family 1*

NOTE: Next time I do this, maybe arrange with these big points:

- *Marriage is companionship*
- *Marriage is permanent*
- *Happy marriages require God’s help*
- *Marriage is not ultimate*

For the next several weeks we’re going to be studying what Jesus taught about romance, marriage, sex, singleness, family, kids, and other small, trifling topics.

It’s **been a while since we’ve done a series like this** here at TSC--about **5 years**--and so I think it’s time.

- Let me just say from the outset that this will be a **great series to BY1! to**.
- You **might think an invite is a small thing**, but let me tell you it can be **life changing**.
 - This past weekend Summit College had their Winter Conference with hundreds of students. It was not only college students from our church, but from 4 churches that we’ve planted.
 - One girl from Mercy Church in Charlotte invited her One with her to the conference. The final night of the conference her friend trusted in Christ! And that just started with an invitation! (Plus, we had 225 students apply for our summer projects this year, the most ever).
- Bottom line: **invite your one**.

Works Consulted:

Confronting Christianity, Rebecca McLaughlin

“Singleness,” Jon Tyson

“Divorce,” John Mark Comer

“Marriage, Divorce, and Singleness,” Tim Keller

- There are **3 things that people who aren’t in church** tend to be open to coming to church for: Christmas services, Easter services, and any series on marriage, family, sex, and dating.
- So, we’re going to be seven weeks on marriage, family and dating, so **invite YOUR ONE**.
- (And btw, when I say ‘one’ I don’t mean that ONE you have your eye on you’re trying to ask out, BUT THE ONE you’ve been **trying to reach out to** for Jesus. **Asking the person you’d like to date** to come sit through this series with you might be a little forward.

Let me state the obvious: Romance and marriage have great potential for good in your life--it’s one of God’s greatest gifts to us-- but the flipside is that has great potential for harm, too.

- **Think about it: Ask most people** to tell you about the most painful moment of their lives and it usually has something to do with relational pain.
- Ask someone to tell you about their greatest mistake and it almost always involves something sexual. Whenever people come into my office and say, ‘Pastor, I need to tell you something I’ve never told anyone...’ It’s almost always related to sex.

In some ways you could think of romance and sex LIKE A...

GUN. When my dad taught me how to use a gun, the first thing he taught me was to **respect it**. The worst thing is somebody grabbing a gun and waving it around with no idea what it can do. My dad would say, “Never point that gun at something you don’t intend to shoot.”

The same thing is true for romance and sex. If you don't respect it and understand its power...

FIRE: Fire has the potential to be a great blessing to you. It also has the potential to do you great harm. Fire in the fireplace is awesome. Fire in your sofa, or your closet, is not.

- This analogy produced one of my most notorious preaching gaffes, btw... *That's not what I meant.*
- **To benefit from fire** you have to respect its power. If you don't...

...it can do you and others great harm.

- **THIS (the Bible)** reveals God's intentions for it. It shows you how God designed sex and how it supposed to work.
 - After I got married, **Danny Akin**, President at SEBTS and mentor to me, told me, "There's only 2 things you need to know for a happy marriage." 1. God is the author of this and his word instructs you on the best way to set it up. If you want to have a happy marriage, happy sex life, happy family, follow God's counsel. **2.**

This series will be more about #1 than #2.

We're calling this series *Forever Family*, and the idea comes from an answer Jesus gave to a controversial question he was asked in Matthew 19. (OPEN BIBLES)

In the answer Jesus introduces a **new outlook on marriage** (at least it will be new for most of us) that **will reshape** how we think of everything connected to marriage--dating, singleness, sex, conflict and etc.

You say, "**Well, I'm not married** and don't think I'll be married anytime in the near future." **Ironically**, this series may be **most helpful** for you! Because, **you see, understanding God's purposes for marriage** will help you see how he fulfills those same purposes in your life in other ways.

(Matthew 19:3–12)

In Matthew 19, Jesus was **hosting a live version** of his own *Ask Me Anything* podcast, [3] **And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"**

[4] He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, (quoting now from Genesis 2, the opening chapters of the Bible) **'For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?** [6] **So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."**

Before we get into Jesus' answer to the divorce question about divorce, **let's consider:**

What does Jesus teach us about *marriage* with these words?

Because his thoughts about marriage shapes his attitude toward divorce, and it also shows us how to think about a bunch of other things connected to marriage, too.

1. The essence of marriage is covenant

- The word “cleave” Jesus cites from Genesis 2 in vs. 5 literally means “to make covenant.”
- The **essence of marriage** is a covenant. Marriage, in a technical sense, is a public vow of faithfulness. **Without that**, you’re not married.
- Having intensely loving feelings or affections for someone doesn’t make you married.
 - **For many of you, no one seems to** be more excited to see you every day than your dog. That doesn’t make you married to the dog.
 - In fact, when you think about it: The **marriage ceremony** is less about the state of your feelings in the present and more about a promise to love in the future.
 - **You covenant to BE tender**, BE faithful, BE kind and compassionate and affectionate and patient from this point on into the future.¹
 - **When I’ve done weddings** couples would ask if they could write their own vows, and that’s great, but I’d always ask them to **let me see them**. Because sometimes the vows would be all about how much they loved each other now... You’re awesome. You smell like rainbows and sunshine. But that’s not what a marriage covenant is about. **The covenant is not about your feelings in the present but your promise for the future.**
- **Marriage is also not just an efficient system** God created to propagate the human species.
 - Rabbits and rats are great at rapid propagation of their species but they don’t get married.
 - Marriage is a union, Jesus says, in which God **fuses two who lives** into one.
 - See vs. 6? “What God has joined together... they are no longer two, but one flesh.” **In a marriage covenant**, your lives are intertwined in such a way that everything about you becomes one: your future families become one. Your future happiness and successes become one; your bank accounts become one; your emotional lives become one. This culminates in sex where physically your bodies become one.
 - And that has **massive implications for how we think about divorce**, Jesus says, which we’ll get to in a minute.
 - **It also has massive implications for how we think about sex**, which we’ll get to later in this series. You see, if God designed marriage as a total fusion of souls, then separating physical oneness from oneness in everything else tears us apart at a fundamental level.
 - **What makes a zombie creepy is that it is a body without a soul.** That and it wants to eat you.
 - Sex apart from marriage separates the body from all the other dimensions of the soul.
 - **You say, “But I really love this person.”** *Yeah, but you and I both know that without a covenant you could walk away from it at any moment.*
 - **The Creator’s design for sex** is that it should be experienced in a relationship in which that physical

¹ Tim Keller, *Marriage, Divorce, & Singleness*, Genesis 2; Matthew 19:3-12

oneness is coupled by oneness in every other area. **Again, more on that later.**

- **But let me just say this: A lot of people think** that Christians are negative on sex: **Don't do it.** Don't talk about it. It's exactly the opposite. We recognize its power and beauty and how its supposed to be a part of complete fusion of lives.

2. The purpose for marriage is friendship

- Hear me out here. There are **a lot of purposes for marriage**, but **the immediate cause** that Jesus points to in Gen 2 as the reason God created marriage, is the need for companionship.
- See verse 5?" **"For this reason** a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife..."
 - What reason is he talking about?
 - **Well, that phrase points of course** to the verse right before it, which says: *"From the beginning God made them male and female."*
- **God's creation of the female** was in response to a problem, and that problem, **Genesis 2:18**, was that it was "not good for the man to be alone. So, God says, I will make a companion for him."
 - **About everything else he had made, God had said, it is "good."**
 - But for the man in his alone state, he said "not good."
 - Again, like I showed you a few weeks ago, God **made** that statement **before the fall.**
 - The ache of loneliness is the one ache we have that does not arise from sin.
 - **Adam had a perfect quiet-time** with God 24 hours a day yet he still ached for human companionship!
- (This was because **God created us in his image**, and God exists eternally as a Trinity in community with his equals.)
- So God created for Adam a companion, his equal, just of the opposite gender. The **word God used to describe her, ezer kenegdo**, means literally, *"alike but different."* Someone like him, his equal, but different--a different gender.
 - In that way they would be like **the Trinity**. In their essence, the same. But in their persons and roles, different.
- **The woman was created to be his companion his friend.**
- Several times in the OT the marriage partner is called that: Hebrew: a **halup**: which means *"deep friend."*
 - BTW, I'm giving y'all a couple of **great nicknames for your boo**, right? *"My hot halup. My lil' ezer kenegdo."* That's better than 'sugar booger,' I think.
- **But all this is why I say friendship/companionship** is the purpose of marriage. (Not the only purpose, but the immediate cause Jesus pointed to as the reason he created it.)
- **And see, if friendship is the purpose of marriage**, that has **massive implications** for DATING.
 - **Because if marriage is about friendship**, friendship ought to be the basis of dating. You should be looking for someone who is your equal, who can be your friend.
 - Someone with whom you can share your **deepest commitments.**
 - **Which is why, if you are a Christian**, you should never date or marry someone who is not a Christian.
 - **For a marriage truly to work, you have to open up** and share the deepest parts of yourself. If you are committed to Jesus, and your partner is not, when **you open all of this up to them**, they're going to not understand it and you will feel violated.

- **Think of life like rowing a boat... pulling two different ways.** If you marry someone who doesn't share your faith in Christ, and it's important to you, then they will constantly misunderstand you and you will be at odds.
- **Friendship being God's purpose for marriage** is also going to have implications for SINGLENES, because Jesus is going to point to a union between us stronger than marriage, a family even more significant than our biological families.

3. The pattern for marriage is the gospel

- This is maybe **the biggest idea of them all**, and something Jesus only alludes to here.
- **In Eph 5, Paul quotes the same passage as Jesus** and says that in this first marriage God was giving a picture of *his* love for his people.
- **This is a big idea:** God designed marriage--and everything that goes with it--to give us a taste of his love.
- **And** not only does that give you a pattern for how to love your spouse, ironically, it will show you how you can be happy and fulfilled in a season when you're not married, **even if** you really want to be.
 - How you can be content in a marriage you're disappointed it; **happy** in an unhappy marriage.
- C.S. Lewis **compared the blessing of marriage** to a ray of sunshine... you look back up along... and when something obscures, the sun remains...
 - **Illus. My plaque.** In experiencing her beauty, I was experiencing something of God. In her love...
 - I hope you will **begin to interpret all of life** that way. It's great.
 - In my parents' love I experienced a shadow of God's love.

- I have **felt his affirmation** in people who have affirmed and believed in me.
- I sense his love in the love I feel for my kids
- All **these are rays pointing me upward** to the sun from which they emanate.
- **And in those seasons** where the clouds of life obscure a ray--through disappointment, or bereavement--the ray may be gone but the sun remains.

So **those are the 3 things Jesus teaches us about marriage here:** the essence of marriage covenant; the purpose for marriage is friendship; and the pattern for marriage is the gospel.

So, let's see **how Jesus uses that to answer** the divorce question:

What does Jesus' teaching on marriage mean for divorce?

(6) "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

No periods. No commas. No fine print. *No recommended reading.*
Period. End of Sentence.

If marriage is a covenant instituted by God to demonstrate his love, a fusion of two souls, **divorce should never** be an option.

But then, [7] They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"

- **Dramatic music. And that was true.** Moses had said in (**Deut 24:1** "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if he finds some indecent in her,") he could divorce her.

- So they are like, “*Well, Jesus, here YOU are saying* we shouldn’t get divorced, but Moses said we could. **GOTCHA!**”
- (For the record, you should never get in a **battle of wits with Jesus**. Particularly over the Bible.
- But the **Pharisees were not always the spiciest Doritos** in the bag, so, they did, and...

[8] *He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.*

- **Rabbis in Jesus’ day** taught a distinction between a command in the law and a concession from the law.
 - **A command** expressed God’s heart: it revealed God’s desires and plans “from the beginning.”
 - **A concession** was something God allowed in society of fallen people, in order to keep peace in a society filled with people at various levels of spiritual maturity.
- This **allowance for divorce, Jesus said, was not a command**; it was a concession due to our fallen state.

And the **Pharisees actually knew** that. Many of the Rabbis at the time taught the **difference in command and concessions** in the law.

But here was their trap: What did Moses mean by ‘something indecent’?

- **Moses said** you could get divorced and technically not be in sin for “**something indecent.**”
- In Hebrew the phrase for ‘something indecent’ is ‘*erwat dabar*,’ and it was ambiguous, even for people who spoke Hebrew.
- What qualified as ***erwat debar***.

² D.A. Carson, *Matthew: The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 411.

³ (Plus, John the Baptist had just been imprisoned and executed for speaking out against casual divorce and remarriage with King Herod. And the Pharisees thought, “Maybe if we can get Jesus to stand up

And there were **two dominant schools** of thought:

- **Rabbi Shammai:**
 - **He said that in context, indecent** meant only ‘*sexual indecency*,’ meaning that Moses was allowing divorce only in cases where sexual indecency had occurred.
 - This was the **conservative position**. It’s what all the Southern Baptists of the time would have believed.
- On the other side you had **Rabbi Hillel** (Hillel was the progressive thinker, he lived in Chapel Hill and drove a Prius)
 - Hillel said “**indecent**” meant **anything** you didn’t like about her.
 - Maybe she has **indecent behavior** by talking too much at parties; or indecent cooking skills, or indecent morning breath.
 - I’m actually **not exaggerating** about this... We have record of him saying, ‘*If she consistently burns the bread, erwat dabar, you may divorce her.*’”
 - “If you fall out of love with her, *erwat dabar*, divorce her. If you fall in love with someone else, *erwat dabar*, divorce her.”²
- And here’s the thing: **The majority of the Jewish world** was on the side of **Rabbi Hillel, the more progressive thinker**. So the Pharisees are trying to get Jesus on record saying something that would make him unpopular.³)

So, what is Jesus’ answer? [9] *And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.*”

Jesus actually comes out **stronger than the conservative** position.

- Not only should you not get divorced, he says,

against divorce like John the Baptist did, we can get him killed, too.” I was helped in the development of the flow of thought here by John Mark Comer, “Divorce,” Mark 10:1–12

- if you marry someone else after leaving your first spouse, you are living in adultery with the 2nd person, because in God's eyes that first covenant is still active.

Because **marriage, you see, is not a contract where you agree to a set of conditions** so long as the other party satisfactorily fulfills theirs. **Marriage is a covenant** wherein you leave and cleave; and you pledge complete, unconditional, sacrificial love that mirrors God's love for us. What God has joined together...

There were **two understandings of marriage** in that day, just like there are 2 in ours. **Consumer and covenant.**

- A **consumer relationship** is a relationship in which you contract with someone to meet a need.
 - There is **nothing wrong with consumer** relationships: I have a consumer relationship with my grocery store—I go because it is convenient to my house; it has fairly good prices and the white chocolate covered Oreos I love.
 - However, **if I find a grocery store that is more convenient**, and has better prices on those Oreos, I go there. It's not a huge deal; I don't have to meet with them and break up with them.
 - That is a **consumer relationship**, and there's nothing wrong with that.
- **But I can't have that kind of relationship** with one of my children. I don't go to them and say, "**You know, Ryah**, things have changed for me and this is just not working out. It's not you; it's me. I **actually have been hanging out** with the neighbor's kids, and I'm kind of happier with them. So, you won't be seeing me much anymore"
- **No--my relationship with my kids is not a consumer relationship.** We're united in a family.
- **According to Jesus, which relationship is marriage more like?** You know the answer: Covenant.

- Dissolving it because it is not working for you is not an option.

Jesus's statement is SO STRONG that the Apostles respond by saying, WOAH! ~~10 The disciples said to him,~~ "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." You say, "Typical male commitment-phobes."

Yeah, but **what you should take from this** is that Jesus' understanding of the covenant of marriage is so strong that it made listeners say, "Wow, if that's what you have to commit to, it might be best to not ever get into it!

- **Because you are saying**, "I'm not going to leave you no matter how much you **disappoint** or **make life difficult** for me."

You say, "**Well, Jesus said 'except for the cause of adultery.'** What is that all about?" "Why would that be an exception?"

- **The logic of this is very important.** There are certain things that can kill the marriage covenant.
- The death of a spouse is one. They die so your **covenant with them is dead.**
- **Adultery kills the covenant.** Adultery is **so powerful and destructive** that many people can't come back from it. **(DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO**, just that many can't come back...)

You say, "**Well, is adultery the only exception?** No. Paul in 1 Cor 7 seems to use the same logic to point to desertion. He says in the case of **desertion** the believer is no longer "bound."

Some people say, "What if there is technically not adultery or the departure of an unbeliever, but one spouse is abusive, or they are involved in illegal activity they won't stop that is putting your family in danger?"

First, *you should definitely get yourself out of the situation immediately.* As far as divorce, many Bible scholars say that the logic

of Paul and Jesus' statements here may allow for divorce when a spouse has killed the covenant by getting to a **place where they are unable to be lived** with. You and your kids are in physical danger because of it.

- (This doesn't mean they've gotten annoying, or "they've just changed," or "they are just not doing it for me," but that they have killed the covenant through adultery or abandonment or abuse.)

The point is: Divorce should be as radical as AMPUTATING an arm of a leg. **What God has joined together, let no man separate.**

- (There are times when amputation may be necessary, but *any doctor would be run out of the practice if he was constantly and quickly saying to any problem: "Let's just amputate."* *'Hangnail? Amputate! Sprained ankle? Amputate! Ugly freckles? Cut it off!'* Amputation is **the last thing** that you do!⁴)
- And you **need to do this under close advisement** of a Christian counselor, and the pastors of your church. If there is abuse happening, go to the authorities--CPS or the police.
- **If you're considering a divorce, this sermon—though helpful—should not be the only thing** weighing in on that decision. **The local church is God's Plan A**, even in situations where you are facing a possible divorce. You might want to start with our G4 ministries (summitchurch.com/g4), which **exist at this church** to help people through situations like this related to sexual addiction, marital betrayal, and divorce care.
- It's tragic how common it is for people to slowly, quietly, and secretly head towards divorce, without ever letting other people know what's going on. **Other people who can help find out** only after the situation is waaaaaay down the line, and it's nearly too late for help or good counsel. **God gave you the church** to walk through this. You don't have to go through this alone.

⁴ Tim Keller, "Marriage, Divorce, & Singleness," Genesis 2; Matthew 19:3-12

And I want to say this before I move on to our **last question**. When divorce happens, that **doesn't disqualify** you as a Christian or make you 2nd rate. **Some people** in the church are **so self-righteous** about divorced people. They look down their nose at them. It's like the '**Scarlet D**' you wear around.

- **But I want you to consider: In Jeremiah 3:8.** God says, "I give **faithless Israel her certificate of divorce.**" **God calls himself a divorced person.** Which means if you want nothing to do with divorced people, or feel like you and your family are too good for them, you are in the unenviable position of feeling like you're too good for God.
- **You say, "Well, what if I was the party at fault? Is divorce the unforgivable sin? (No)."** Can you repent and remarry after you cheated?
 - Tim Keller: "King David started his relationship with Bathsheba in the worst of possibilities. David fell in love, had an affair, and then had her husband killed. Talk about being knee deep in sin.

But when he confessed and repented God cleansed and blessed his new marriage to Bathsheba to the point that from that marriage came Solomon, and from Solomon came Jesus. Unbelievable.

What does that mean other than God is trying to say to all of us, *'I can redeem the worst situations. I love doing it. I love redeeming the hardest cases. Go ahead, try me.'*"

(I read that and I want to start singing, Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. Grace, grace, God's grace. Grace that can pardon and cleanse within. Grace, grace, God's grace; grace that is greater than all our sin."

- There's no mess you can't bring to Jesus. **No one has ever been turned away**. He can forgive and restore you.

Lastly,

What does Jesus' teaching on marriage mean for singleness?

We're **only going to touch on this very briefly** because we'll return to it later. When the disciples say: 10 The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." Jesus responds: 11 But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. (IOW, if you're going to survive in marriage, God's going to have to give you grace for it). (What? No **AMEN's on that?** I'll AMEN myself! AMEN! I married the perfect girl. And I **always say** that I've been married to her for **16 wonderful** years, and 3 others, for a total of 19. God's grace dragged us through those 3.)

12 For (but there are also) there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

Marriage was God's answer to loneliness. It was his plan-A. But **we live in a fallen world**, and in that world some people end up single.

- (Technically, **a eunuch is a man whose reproductive organs** have been destroyed. But here, **Jesus uses it as a metaphor** for someone not married.)⁵

- For some, they were **single from birth**. Maybe they just have no desire to be married.
- Some were **single by choice**. They've chosen to be single because of other things God has called them to.
- For others, they are single by circumstance (this is **how I read 'made so by men'**). They just haven't found the right person yet. Or some physical thing that keeps them from getting married.

In order to live happy as a single, Jesus says, it takes a special enabling by heaven. That's what he means by **vs. 12, Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.**

Living as a single person is a special enabling by God. **But here's the thing: as we saw, living successfully as a married person also takes a special enabling** of God.

- **So, IOW, Marriage is so difficult** that you can only make it with God's help
- Singleness is so difficult that you can only make it with God's help
- So whether God has called you to be single or married in this season, you need his help!

Based on how I read Genesis 2, if we lived in the perfect Garden of Eden, everyone would be married. For every Eve, God would supply an Adam. **But we don't**. We live in a fallen world. And in that world, marriage won't be for everybody. But you see here that **God has a plan for singleness** and that means he'll supply what we're missing from marriage.

After all, **marriage was just a stand-in** to teach us about God's love. And if for some reason your life is shielded from that ray for a season or your whole life, **God's love will supply** what you lack because even when the ray is hidden, the sun of his love remains.

⁵ Nearly every commentator (NIGTC, PNTC, NAC) takes this approach

Not being married is not keeping you from a relationship essential for life.

- **Think about it: Jesus was the most happy, fulfilled, fully alive** person ever to walk the face of the earth and he was single. **At no point in the Gospels do we see even a *hint*** that his singleness was a symbol of inferiority or a source of dissatisfaction.
- And **Jesus' singleness certainly didn't mean he didn't fully know love**. Right? Just before he died, he told his disciples: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life *for his friends*" (John 15:13). He knew and experienced the greatest love available.
- **Paul**, who wrote so much of our New Testament, was single and said he wished everyone in the church had the gift of singleness like him.
 - **There's so much you can do with that gift**--so many ways you can be used in ministry that married people, who are encumbered with the cares of a family, cannot be.
- **For those who aren't married**, Jesus said (and I'll show you this later) **the church, the body of Christ**, is your forever family. Our biological families, our marriage partners, that is temporary. **Christ's body** is permanent. And that's something single and married people can participate in alike.
- More on that in the weeks to come...

But for this weekend, where this passage should leave you is asking: "**What does God want from me?**" Because whatever he wants from me, you're going to need his grace to accomplish it.

And so, **if you're married or single, the application is the same: Seek God first**, because whatever state you are in, you'll need his help.

In fact, if you're single and really want to be married, let me remind you of Jesus' great promise about this and every other thing you're worried about: **Matt 6:33...**

- IOW, **you worry about *this* relationship** (the vertical one), the ultimate relationship, and let God worry about all these (the horizontal ones).
- Like **C.S. Lewis said**: In life there are 1st things and 2nd things...
- But if you worry about 1st things, he'll supply: It **will blow your mind** the ways he'll do that. More on that to come!

Well, it's **going to be a great series**. Hope to see you back next week.

STAND: Missional Blessing

As you go I'd like to remind you of two things:

- 1) Bring someone with you next week!
- 2) You *need to attend your Campus Prayer Night...* (How many people show up on Sunday shows you how popular the pastor and worship leaders are. How many show up for prayer meeting shows you how popular Jesus is

