

# Divorce and Remarriage

By Evan Lenow

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Read the comments related to Matthew 19:3–6 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What does Jesus reveal about marriage from the creation story?

### Assignment Two

Use a concordance or online Bible search to find where the phrase “hardness of heart” is used in the Bible. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What are the attitudes of the people described with hard hearts?

### Assignment Three

Read the comments related to Matthew 19:7–10 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: Should Christians pursue divorce and subsequent remarriage?

### Scripture to Memorize

*So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.* Matthew 19:6

### Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will recognize that God's design for marriage is that it would be a permanent covenant between a man and a woman.

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## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

One of your friends comes to you in tears. She tells you that her parents are getting divorced and there is nothing she can do about it. Her parents told her they are no longer happy together and God would want them to be happy. Therefore, they are ending their marriage and leaving your friend to pick up the pieces of living in a broken home. She wants to know what the Bible says about divorce. What do you tell her?

### What God Has Joined Together

Read Matthew 19:3–10 out loud.

#### Studying the Passage

**Verse 3. Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?** The Pharisees wanted to know about divorce. Specifically, they may have been asking about Jesus' interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1–4. In that passage, Moses addressed a situation where a man had divorced his wife because of "some indecency." She had subsequently remarried, but that husband had divorced her or died. Moses then prevented the first husband from remarrying her. The Pharisees wanted to know if that "indecency" represented any reason, or if it must be something serious, like adultery, to warrant the divorce.

**Verse 4. made them male and female.** Rather than answering their question immediately, Jesus pointed the Pharisees to the original intent of marriage. He first referenced Genesis 1:27. Jesus wanted them to focus their attention on God's design for marriage. The first point He made is that marriage is between a man and a woman.

**Verse 5. the two shall become one flesh.** Jesus then quoted Genesis 2:24, which describes the man and the woman becoming one flesh. In this verse, we see that God's design for marriage is the union of a male and female.

**Verse 6. God has joined together.** After establishing that marriage is a union between one man and one woman, Jesus pointed out that God brings people together in marriage. In His sovereignty, He oversees every marriage even if a couple does not acknowledge God. **let not man separate.** The final characteristic of marriage Jesus emphasized is its permanence. God's design for marriage did not allow for divorce when He created marriage. The simple answer to the Pharisees' question, then, is that divorce is not God's plan.

#### Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on what Jesus taught about marriage from the creation story.

#### Discussion Question

What can we learn about marriage today from Jesus' teaching? Does His standard for marriage still apply?

#### Studying the Passage

**Verse 7. certificate of divorce.** The Pharisees were not satisfied with Jesus' answer. They pointed Jesus back to the tradition of giving a woman a certificate of divorce to indicate that she

was no longer married.

**Verses 8. hardness of heart.** Jesus once again refocused the conversation and pointed to the real reason for divorce—hardness of heart. The Greek term translated “hardness of heart” describes someone who is obstinate and stubborn. Usually that person is unwilling to follow God’s will or commands. Jesus used this term to describe the reason Moses allowed some of the Israelites to divorce. **from the beginning it was not so.** Jesus pointed them back to the creation narrative once again to remind them that God never intended for divorce when He created marriage.

### **Assignment Two Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on the use of “hardness of heart” in Scripture.

**Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4**

### **Studying the Passage**

It is important to remember that this passage is not a direct teaching about divorce. Instead, it is a case law that teaches the people of Israel about how God wanted them to deal with a particular situation that was already practiced in that day, although not God’s ideal. One can think of it in this way: If (vv 1-3)... then (v 4). Verses one through three must be present in order for verse 4 to be applied. It is not intended to provide teaching on divorce, but rather specific instruction regarding the remarriage of those who are divorced in this particular context.

**Verse 1. Some indecency.** Although this phrase is very difficult to translate, it is highly unlikely that the reason for divorce was adultery, since adultery was punishable by death. It was probably some form of indecency. However, keep in mind that Moses was describing a case, not prescribing a course of action on how to deal with the wife.

**Verse 4. Then.** After the case is stated in verses 1-3, the only phrase which instructs the nation on how to act is given in verse 4. **Defiled.** While this word seems harsh, it would appear as though God is letting His people know that this case study is placed on a par with adultery. (See Mark 10:11-12) The Hebrew word means “to be made unclean,” and can refer to sexual, religious or ceremonial uncleanness. **Abomination.** This Hebrew term refers to things that are “aesthetically or morally repulsive.” A quick word study in the Old Testament reminds us that things that are an abomination are not pleasing to God, but are, in fact, detestable to Him: incest, adultery, homosexuality, child sacrifice and bestiality to name a few. **You shall not bring sin upon the land.** In Leviticus 18:24-25, Israel is instructed, “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.” The land was “defiled” by the sexual immorality of the Canaanites and in a similar way, the nation of Israel was in danger of the same thing.

Clearly, God’s design for marriage was permanent. It is important that we wrestle with the difficult texts of Scripture to come to an understanding of what God’s plan is for those of us who are living together on this planet. While these texts do not clearly give us commendations or prohibitions, it is our hope that they begin to help us wrestle with not what we want, but what He wants.

### **Assignment Three Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share an answer to the question: Should Christians pursue divorce and subsequent remarriage?

### **Discussion Question**

How can we help prevent divorce in the church?

### **On Your Own**

In the space below, write the names of some families who have been through a divorce and how you can pray for them.

### **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

### **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

### **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

### **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

**Prayer**

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

## **At Home: Nail It Down**

Approximately 35 percent of all marriages in the United States end in divorce. That means you will encounter many people who have either gone through divorce themselves or someone close to them has gone through a divorce. It is a tragic circumstance that impacts more people every day.

The biblical position on divorce and remarriage is difficult for even Christians to adhere to in contemporary culture. We do not think of anything as permanent, even marriage. Instead, we typically view marriage as a contract that can be maintained or broken by the individuals involved. This is not what Jesus taught about marriage. He taught that marriage is a permanent union between a man and a woman that brings them together as one flesh. In a world where the definition of marriage seems to be changing constantly, we need to return to the unchanging words of Scripture to find the true definition of marriage.

You can study a number of passages regarding divorce and remarriage. The key ones include Deuteronomy 24:1–4; Matthew 5:31–23; 19:3–10; Mark 10:2–12; and 1 Corinthians 7:10–16. Spend time in these passages to see what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage. Also take time to study the passages about God’s design for marriage. These passages include Genesis 2:18–24; 1 Corinthians 7; and Ephesians 5:22–33.

It is time for Christians to change the tragic trend of divorce in our culture. We start by living out God’s design for marriage. Then we need to take the focus off ourselves and start humbling ourselves to think of the needs of others above our own (see Philippians 2:3–4). When we do that, then our marriages will be a testimony of God’s work to the world.

### **Follow up Question**

What is Jesus’ perspective on divorce and remarriage?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.