

Bridgeway Christian Church
The Greatest Opportunity Series, Part 23
A Radical Reframing
August 24/25, 2024

In 2016, a Swiss-born British philosopher named Alain de Botton, who I should add is not a Christian, wrote a newspaper column with the optimistic and hope-filled title “Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person.” He begins the column saying, “It’s one of the things we are most afraid might happen to us. We go to great lengths to avoid it. And yet we do it all the same: We marry the wrong person.”

He goes to say that part of the reason for this is that as we get close to people, a bewildering number of problems start to emerge. “We seem normal,” he says, “only to those who don’t know us very well. In a wiser, more self-aware society than our own, a standard question on any early dinner date would be: “And how are you crazy?”

“Our partners,” he says, “are no more self-aware. Naturally we make a stab at trying to understand them. We visit their families. We look at their photos, we meet their college friends. All this contributes to a sense that we’ve done our homework. We haven’t. Marriage ends up as a hopeful, generous, infinitely kind gamble taken by two people who don’t know yet who they are or who the other might be, binding themselves to a future they cannot conceive of and have carefully avoided investigating.”

Right now you might be thinking two things. One, if you’ve been married for more than twenty minutes, you might be thinking, “Yep, that checks out.”

Two, you might be thinking, Pastor Brian, how did you first come across this rosy, joyful description of marriage? It was quoted, at length, at a Christian wedding ceremony I attended. But it was actually a beautiful ceremony, and the pastor did a wonderful job using the article to make the point we would be better off if approached marriage looking to serve more than be served. And, de Botton turns the corner about midway through the article. He suggests that as we come face to face with our own flaws and the flaws of our partner, this ought not lead us to separate.

What we must separate from, he argues, is the overly romantic view of marriage that is sold to us by movies that imply endless passion and butterflies, and instead adopt what he calls a tragic and at points comedic view, in which we recognize that there exists no human who can meet all of our needs, and that every human will eventually frustrate, anger, and annoy us, and try as we might, we will do the same to them.

We must discover not perfect complementarity, but rather the mutual ability to tolerate differences with generosity. Compatibility, he argues, is an achievement of love, not its precondition. He concludes by saying we would be well-served to adopt a more forgiving and kind attitude toward both ourselves and our partners.

Certainly a Christian worldview would affirm much of this. Scripture teaches us that a marriage is not simply a legal contract to be nullified when things get hard, but it is a lifelong covenant meant to be an earthly representation of the relationship of Christ to his Church.

Around the time that article was published a secular social psychologist studying marriage determined that across society we have undergone a fundamental shift in the expectations we have for marriage. He argued that while in years past marriage was first about safety and financial security and then later it was about love and companionship, marriage for the last 50 or so years has been more about self-discovery, self-esteem, and personal growth.

In other words, we have begun to view marriage less as an essential institution and more as a means of achieving personal fulfillment. The benefit of this is that the happiest marriages are happier than they have ever been. But, one of the unfortunate side effects of this way of thinking, he argues, is that we expect far too much of our romantic partners, and far too little of ourselves (I used that one in a wedding ceremony once). It was clear to me from reading his findings that many of us are expecting from our partners what our faith teaches us we find in God: a sense of identity, meaning, and purpose.

Given these expectations it is no wonder that across society we struggle to adopt a more forgiving and kind attitude toward our partners.

The divorce rate in the United States still hovers around 45%, and the impact of divorce is everywhere. I know there are many in this room who have experienced divorce, or are children of divorce. On one level, I'm about as insulated from divorce as a person in 21st century America can be. My parents and in-laws have both been married for over 40 years, my grandparents remained married until the end of their lives, and my wife and I will celebrate 17 years of marriage in just a couple of weeks. And yet, if you go out one level, my dad has seven siblings - and observant Catholic parents, just to explain that one -, and my mom has three. Out of those ten individuals, two never married and just two of the remaining eight are married to their first spouse.

I'm well aware that divorce is all around us, and with it comes tremendous pain. One pastor I read compared divorce with the death of a spouse. A death, he said is clean pain. It is horrific and it is pure grief. A divorce, on the other hand, is dirty pain, where our grief is mixed with all sorts of feelings like guilt, regret, or anger.

Many of you know first hand the increase in anxiety, depression and attachment challenges that come with divorce. You know about the increase in economic insecurity. You know about the guilt and feelings of failure that linger.

In my work I am constantly reminded of how fragile and difficult marriage can be. Just like no one comes to a doctor to proclaim they are healthy, no one comes to a pastor to let them know their marriage is doing great. I hear your stories and I see your heartbreak as you try to navigate the challenges of life together. I hear stories of harshness and despair, and uncertainty about how to move forward as you are beaten down and discouraged and yet still committed to honoring your covenant promise. I've officiated around 25 or 30 weddings, and while the majority of those couples are still together, there are several who are not. I carry the tragedy of those failed marriages with me. And then in my own marriage, which my wife and I are deeply committed to. In 17 years we've brought each other a lot of joy, but also tremendous pain.

And so today we're going to look at Jesus' teachings about divorce, and I'm going to do my best to guide us today in a manner that demonstrates faithfulness to the text and pastoral sensitivity. And if this is your first time at Bridgeway, this one is going to be a little rough. Give us another shot next week. It will be better, I promise.

What I want us to see today is the fill-in the blank on your handout or on the app and it's this: **Marriage requires SERVANTHOOD and COMMITMENT**. Before it is a place for self-actualization, Christian marriage is the primary place where we live out God's call to consider another more important than ourselves as we embody the humble servanthood of Christ, and commit ourselves to honoring God's intention that marriage is a lifelong covenant.

Go ahead and open in your Bible or your Bible app to Mark 10. It's on page 845 on the Bibles underneath the seat in front of you. This is part 23 of our series The Greatest Opportunity through the book of Mark, and I've entitled this message A Radical Reframing.

We are a Bible-teaching, Bible reading church. We teach through books of the Bible line-by-line, and we don't shy away from challenging passages. And you'll see that is true with the passage we're going to study today. I'm going to read the whole thing and then we'll pick it apart.

²And he left there and went ^ato the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.

² And Pharisees came up and in order ^bto test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" ³ He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴ They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." ⁵ And Jesus said to them, "Because of your ^ehardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶ But ^ffrom the beginning of creation, 'God made them ^gmale and female.' ^{7 h}"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,^{1 8} and ⁱthe two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. ^{9 j}What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

¹⁰ And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹ And he said to them, ^k"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹² and ^lif she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

I really hope Pastor Lance is enjoying his vacation.

This passage begins a chapter that is full of contrast. Jesus will repeatedly contrast conventional values that were normative in the surrounding culture of the time with the radical, beautiful, life-giving, God-glorifying values of the Kingdom of God. And he starts out with a doozy. This is the only teaching about divorce in the gospel of Mark, and it takes place as Jesus is continuing his march toward Jerusalem.

The passage begins with Jesus heading to Judea beyond the Jordan, and we'll see the significance of that in a moment. A crowd gathers, and Jesus taught them. As he is teaching, Pharisees come to him, and it says there intention is to *test* him. They ask, "**Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?**" And the first thing we have to point out is this is not a good faith question. It's not a sober-minded attempt at understanding or information. It is one of the lowest forms of human communication, and that is a gotcha question.

It's a gotcha question for a few reasons. First of all, this question isn't random. There was significant debate at that time between different schools of Judaism about this issue. The School of Shammai allowed divorce only in cases of sexual misconduct, whereas the more theologically liberal school of Hillel allowed for divorce for almost any reason. Some rabbis even approved divorce for burning a meal, and there's even one rabbi who said in the Mishnah that divorce was permitted if a man found someone "fairer than she".

It was as if they said, if the smoke alarm is her timer when she cooks, or you just see a better option, you can go on your way. The Jewish historian Josephus argued that divorce was permissible for any cause, even saying that he himself divorced his wife because he was "not pleased with her behavior." We have no record of her opinion of his behavior. So this was a matter of significant debate at the time, and they are looking for a hot take from Jesus that will force him to take a side and alienate the other side.

It's also a gotcha question because Jesus has now ventured across the Jordan into territory controlled with Herod Antipas. We learned back in Mark 6 that Herod Antipas was in an inappropriate relationship with his brother's wife. John the Baptist spoke out against him, and was ultimately executed for it. It's possible, even likely, that the Pharisees were trying to bait Jesus into speaking out against Herod in the hopes that he would then suffer a fate similar to John's.

But, keep in mind, this is Jesus. He eats gotcha questions for lunch. So he puts the question back on them. **"What did Moses command you?"** He says in verse 3. And they refer to Deuteronomy 24, where Moses didn't actually command anything, but rather he said this: **"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,"** and then he goes on to say that if the woman then goes and marries someone else then she can't go back and re-marry her first husband."

This passage was at the heart of the debate over the legitimacy of divorce that was raging in that day. Moses said that a man could pursue a divorce if he found **"something indecent in her"** and there was disagreement on what that meant.

I'm not trying to be crude here, but the literal translation of the Hebrew here is "nakedness of a thing." So if a man found "nakedness of a thing" in his wife he could pursue divorce. We know that can't mean adultery, because Leviticus 20:10 said the penalty for adultery was death. The legitimacy of someone's divorce is no longer an issue if that person is dead. But Shammai said it meant some sort of sexual sin, whereas Hillel said it could mean anything.

This passage, then, is not a command authorizing divorce. Rather, Moses's instruction is a concession to human sinfulness that would lead to divorce in the first place. And, it was a means of protecting women in a male-dominated society, because a certificate of divorce would prove that a woman was now single and eligible to re-marry. In a world where marriage was far less about romance and more about literal survival, this was critical.

Now, look back at verse 5. **"And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.""** Jesus said, Moses didn't command divorce or even authorize

it. Rather, he made a concession because of your hardness of heart. If you've heard the medical term arteriosclerosis, the hardening of the arteries, the term here is sklero-cardia, hardening of the heart. And when this term is used in Scripture, often by Jesus, it refers to people's attitude toward God, not their attitude toward one another.

Jesus says, this allowance from Moses was needed because you turned your heart away from God, and subsequently turned away from your spouse. So much of our relational dysfunction today starts not with us and another person, but with us turning away from God and valuing our selfish interests over God's interests. When Paul talks about marriage in Ephesians 5 he calls husbands and wives to submit to one another. And he doesn't say submit to one another because we deserve it, **he says submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** Our ability to appropriately value our spouse and put their needs above our own is rooted not in lovey dove-y feelings that are not exactly consistent, but in our reverence for our savior who died to bring us life.

Jesus says, Moses had to make a concession for you because your hard heart toward me led to a hard heart toward others which led to dysfunction. Because when your heart is hard, your inner defense attorney will justify any manner of selfish and destructive behavior whether it is toward God or another person. And this leaks into marriage.

Some of you have likely heard of John Gottman. He taught and researched out of the University of Washington and he is regarded as one of the foremost experts of the last century on marriage stability and divorce prediction. And in his work he borrows a biblical allusion and talks about the four horseman, four behaviors that can cause significant harm in a marriage relationship.

Gottman's research is readily available online, but I want to mention the four behaviors briefly. All of these behaviors, in my view, begin with a hard heart toward God that leads to a hard heart toward our partners.

The first is criticism, specifically, attacking your partner's character rather than seeking a solution to a particular situation or behavior. "You're so lazy!" is an example of criticism. Rather than helping with the behavior in question, criticism often produces shame, which can cause the behavior to get worse.

The second, arguably the most dangerous of the four, is contempt. Contempt includes things like mocking, showing disrespect, or belittling your partner. When we show contempt we are claiming superiority and conveying disgust. The target of contempt is made to feel worthless and morally inferior.

The third is defensiveness. Defensiveness is about playing the victim. It involves making excuses or counterattacking when our partner brings up a concern. Defensive people will excuse their own offenses, and then suggest they are the real victim because they are being questioned. All of us are defensive to some degree, but it is worth our while to do everything we can to reduce or eliminate our tendency to get defensive. When we are defensive, we think we are protecting ourselves, when really all we're doing is showing our partner that we are unwilling to listen to their concerns.

I remember when I was in college one of my best friends was dating this woman, and he would complain to us that any time he shared a concern or something she had done that hurt him, she would immediately flip it around and make him the bad guy. I called this “the doghouse switcheroo” and that became language that my friends and I would use to try to make light of the frustrating situation. They worked hard on their relationship both themselves and with the help of a counselor, and they celebrated 19 years of marriage last May, but that was a real source of frustration for them in their early days.

The fourth is stonewalling, which is when one partner withdraws, shuts down, or stops responding. Stonewalling is not taking a break or asking for some time alone, both of which can be healthy. It is instead a refusal to engage. Stonewalling is often a reaction to contempt, which then leads to a vicious cycle of more stonewalling or contempt.

A hard-hearted person is unwilling to look within themselves to examine how they are contributing to the challenges in their relationship, and are only willing to locate problems outside of themselves.

A person with a soft heart is primarily concerned with what’s going on inside of them. They, along with David in Psalm 139, ask God to help them see if there is any unrighteous way in them. That doesn’t mean you’re a doormat and it doesn’t mean you don’t ever speak up about problems, but it means that your default is to validate and address your partner’s concerns instead of employing one of the four horsemen.

And I know what you’re thinking: First, if you’re married, you’re thinking that you hope your spouse was listening. You’re wondering if they’re taking notes. Do not look and check, eyes up here. But that’s not helpful. Don’t get me wrong, I’m on your side here. I hope they were listening, too. But it is up to us to care more about rooting these out of our own hearts, because we can only control ourselves.

Second, you’re thinking, I hear you Brian, but the reason I criticize my husband is that he is an idiot. Or the reason I get defensive is I don’t think my wife’s misinterprets everything I do.

Here’s the truth: Unless you’re a sociopath, you’re not going to use one of the four horsemen for no reason. We always have a reason. We’ve all got a voice telling us we are justified in treating our partners in these ways. And that voice is lying to you. It is telling you to put gas on a fire.

Absolutely nothing good comes from getting defensive or attacking your partner’s character. No matter the reason, if you treat your spouse or anyone in this manner, you are harming them. Nothing good comes from contempt or stonewalling.

I was reading this book earlier this month, and it wasn’t even about marriage, but the author shared this anecdote. He said he was in the middle of a huge fight with his wife, and at one point when they had take a break he was with his friend, and he breathlessly outlined all of way that he was right and his wife was wrong, and oh my gosh what is her problem and all of that.

And his friend looked at him and said, “Mike, do you want to be right or do you want to be happy?” And he talked about how that question quite literally changed his life. Too many of us

care more about being right than nurturing relationships, and in our obsession to prove ourselves we sow the seeds of our own misery and our loved one's deep pain.

There is a reason the Bible constantly calls us to character traits like humility, love, and patience. One is because they are the foundation of healthy relationships. The other is because they don't come naturally to us. Contempt does. Defensiveness does. Criticism does. Stonewalling does. But their toxic. Whatever you can do to root those things out of your heart will be worth the effort a hundred fold. They are symptoms of a hard heart. And they hurt the people you love, and they hurt you.

As followers of Jesus we are called not to behave in a manner that we can justify. We are called to cruciform, or cross-shaped attitudes where we serve one another and support one another.

Your hardness of heart, Jesus said, is what caused Moses to write this concession to begin with. Then, he totally flips the conversation on its head. He basically says, if you are asking when you can get a divorce and have God be cool with it you are asking the wrong question. You are asking about divorce because you don't have a proper understanding of what marriage is in the first place. Verse 6:

But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

God's intention for marriage, Jesus said, goes back to the very beginning of creation, where God made us male and female, and where a man is to leave his parents and cleave to his wife, and when they are married that doesn't just mean they get to jointly file their taxes, it means in the eyes of God they are one flesh.

In that time, men would look for ways out of their marriages, and the result would be physical, social, and emotional hardship for their wives and children. So Jesus says, how about instead of looking for loopholes you remember what you signed up for?

You're looking for a loophole because you don't understand that a marriage is a not a business deal it's a covenant. It's a promise that you enter into for life, not an agreement you wiggle out of when it no longer serves your purposes. If you're trying to learn to fly a plane and you're asking you do you crash it most gently you are asking the wrong question.

More than that, Jesus locates the authority over a marriage beyond the husband and a wife. Jesus makes it clear that neither man nor woman controls Christian marriage. He says "**what God has joined together let not man separate.**"

A man might propose, and couple might go through counseling, and pick out the venue, and come up with the perfect Instagram hashtag, and get all of the details of the ceremony just right. An officiant might be there to witness the vows and make a pronouncement, but it is God who makes Christian marriage. He's the boss, he's the architect, he is the one who joins a husband and a wife together. This is not marriage as the culture, or the government, or anyone else defines it. This is marriage in God's eyes.

Now, it is cliché and objectively incorrect to claim that our generation is somehow more morally perverse than the generations before us. Human beings have always treated relationships with less sanctity than they deserve, and we've always sought to use people for our benefit rather than serve them for theirs. However, while I don't believe there is something uniquely wicked about the human heart today versus, say, a generation or two, or three, or four, or five ago, this is an age that is unique in human history in three ways: our access to other individuals, our lack of reliance on others for our survival, our lack of social connection so we have fewer people to walk alongside us when marriage gets hard.

Whereas past generations had limited options for establishing a social circle, and even more limited options for selecting a romantic partner and eventually a spouse, right now our options are virtually unlimited. Similarly, for huge percentages of us, basic survival has never been easier. We need each other less, we have access to more, so we can dispose of inconvenient relationships more easily.

And in an age of impermanent commitments and online divorces starting at \$159, those who would follow Jesus must recognize that marriage is not a tool for self-actualization that can be discarded when it fails to meet that purpose. It is a covenant promise before God that is a tool for our discipleship and our sanctification. We can, like the Pharisees, look for loopholes by asking what is permitted, or we can commit ourselves to what God has shown us in his Word that he intends.

Part of that process, by the way, is taking marriage seriously before it starts. We can talk all day long about the problems of easy divorce, but too often it is preceded by easy marriage. On one level, as I referenced earlier, it's impossible to know what you're getting into when you get married. Any married person can tell you that. But too often, we enter into marriage when our brain chemistry isn't exactly in an optimal state for making wise and sustainable decisions.

That's why, at Bridgeway, if you want one of us pastors to officiate your wedding, we make you sign a contract. On that contract you commit to ongoing, active involvement in a local church. You commit to abstinence before marriage, or where that has not occurred, a period of at least six months of abstinence prior to your wedding because we want to honor God's design for sex. You commit to the hard work of premarital counseling so that you can truly assess your compatibility under the supervision of a pastor, or preferably, a trained counselor. We require this because we believe that the best time to start honoring God's design for marriage is before the marriage starts, and we don't want to waste our time complaining about how they're defining marriage out there. We want to do the work required to honor marriage in here.

By rooting marriage in the design of God from the beginning of creation, Jesus also helps us think differently about divorce. Divorce is a tragedy because it amounts to a failed covenant promise. It is the tearing apart of what God has joined together. Though there are conditions where divorce is allowed, God never sanctions divorce. It is a tragedy that, like any relational breakdown, is the result of human sinfulness, or to use Jesus language, hardness of heart.

Then in verse 10, Jesus is no longer with the crowds, but is rather in a house with his disciples. In the book of Mark, houses are often places where, away from the crowds, Jesus explains his

teaching to his disciples. And in that private setting, he certainly doesn't soften his words. If anything he does the opposite.

“And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.””

In Matthew's version of this story, found in Matthew 19, and in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 he echoes this teaching, but in both cases he adds an exception clause, saying in essence, whoever divorces, except for sexual unfaithfulness, and marries another commits adultery. Most believe Mark didn't include this because no one in his audience would have questioned that adultery was a legitimate grounds for divorce.

And this is serious teaching, but I can't help but laugh at this comment from the disciples that Matthew includes in Matthew 19:10. After hearing all of this 'marriage is permanent' talk from Jesus they say, **“If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”** It's like they're saying, yikes Jesus, you're being a little intense about this. But even in that question there is wisdom. This was an important word in the first-century and it's an important word for today: Those unwilling or unable to make the requisite commitment are better off not marrying.

But what are we to make of these words? I'm very aware of the fact that in this room there are undoubtedly many who have walked through the pain of divorce, and many more who have experienced it in their immediate or extended family. Few who have been through a divorce would argue against the idea that human sin was involved, and yet we cannot fall into the trap of elevating divorce above other sins. I have a few observations:

First, divorce is a tragedy. While there are times when it might be necessary, it is still a tragedy. It's a breaking of a covenant, the most permanent kind of promise there is. I say that not to provoke guilt, but rather to underscore the seriousness of divorce. Marriage is meant to be an earthly picture of the relationship between Christ and his Church. And divorce means that didn't happen. It's tragic. No matter how disposable relationships are culturally, it is tragic.

Second, we know for certain that Jesus does not provide an exhaustive list of instances in which divorce is acceptable. You might say, Brian, it sure seems like he does. And I would point you to 1 Corinthians 7:15, in a section that begins with Paul saying specifically that what he is saying comes from the Lord, he says, **“But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.”**

Paul makes it clear that there is another instance in which divorce, while still tragic, is acceptable. And that is abandonment by an unbelieving spouse. And many have argued, and I would join them, that physical abuse would certainly constitute an abandonment of the marriage covenant.

Furthermore, while we don't have a specific record of this sort of instance taking place, it is impossible for me to imagine Jesus, who defended the downtrodden and the marginalized at every turn, and who defended and elevated women at every turn, instructing a person who was in physical danger in their home to return to that home. A person experiencing such a situation ought to find at their church support, prayer, comfort, and help in removing themselves from that

environment and contacting law enforcement. Should conversations be had and resources deployed to see if reform is possible for the abusing party? Absolutely.

But I've heard stories of pastors telling people not to separate from abusive spouses or not report abusive spouses to the proper authorities, and I cannot for even a second believe that reflects the heart of God. When crimes have been committed and people are in danger, law enforcement should be contacted.

Third, what does a passage like this mean for those who have divorced and remarried, particularly if the divorce wasn't on biblical grounds?

There are *a lot* of opinions from pastors and Bible scholars on this question, and I don't think it wise or appropriate to offer an overly dogmatic answer to that question. That said, an unbiblical divorce is a reality to be acknowledged and a sin to be confessed. An argument for re-marriage is, admittedly, an argument from silence, and I would join pastors like Tim Keller in saying if re-marriage is an option at all it ought only be after personal repentance and an acknowledgement of personal wrongdoing. The first senior pastor I worked for told me many years ago that before he will consider officiating someone's second wedding they must be able to explain specifically what aspects of their divorce were their fault. I believe that is a wise practice.

I also appreciate the words of a pastor named Jay Adams who asked a generation ago, "Why should divorce be the only unforgivable sin?" For those in second marriages, we need not live our life plagued by guilt. Rather, we can confess our sin if we haven't already, trust in God's forgiveness, and endeavor to glorify God in our current marriage.

Fourth, when those who have experienced the tragedy of divorce come to church, they ought to be met with compassion, kindness, and love, never smugness or judgment. Regardless of your marital status, there is room for you at the cross. And we can compassionately encourage one another toward holiness, but there is no room for judgment. I'm so thankful for Christian ministries like DivorceCare, that help men and women heal from the pain of divorce, and we are hopeful that we will be able to start a DivorceCare ministry here soon.

And in closing, I want us to see that these challenging words at the end of this passage are actually incredibly good news. Jesus says, "Don't get a divorce and re-marry, because if you do so you've committed adultery. What makes it adultery? It's adultery because marriage is meant to show the world what is true about Christ. Jesus never leaves his bride, the church. He is never unfaithful to her, he never abandons her, he never forsakes her. He loves her perfectly. He protects her fiercely. He receives her back when she is wayward. And he sacrifices for her and delights in her.

And though we might yet fail to keep our commitments, Jesus never fails to keep his. And his words are a reminder that whatever our mistakes and failures, in marriage or in any other area of our lives, if we repent and trust him, if we recognize that he died on the cross to rescue us from all of our sin. We can receive the love and forgiveness of our always faithful savior and perfect servant king, who welcomes us and makes us whole.

Let's pray.