

Small Groups @ TBC Sermon Discussion Notes

Note to session leader: *Be aware that for some in your group this may be far more than a discussion, since they, or people close to them, may have experienced divorce or be struggling in their marriage at this time.*

Date of Sermon: June 12th 2016

Speaker: David Lawrence

Title: Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom of Marital Faithfulness

Introduction: In today's passages, Jesus teaches and responds to questions about divorce. His strategy is though, to first point his listeners to an understanding of *marriage*, and only then tackle where divorce may - or may not- be permissible. In our culture, views of marriage and divorce are so far removed from the Bible's that to many Jesus' views may sound restrictive: however, as Christians, we believe that God's blueprint for life in his kingdom offers the very best way to build a full life, both for individuals, couples and for society as a whole.

Review: (invite one or more who have heard the talk to give their own brief review)

Read: Matthew 5:31, 32 & 19:1-12

Reflect:

- In Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus quotes Genesis 1:27 & 2:24 to describe God's intention for marriage 'in the beginning'. What key foundations for a Christian view of marriage can be found in these verses?
- Christian marriage is normally understood as a 'covenant'. A 'covenant' is *a life-long treaty defining a relationship between two (or more) people in which both commit to honour defined obligations to one another.*
 - Is this how people view marriage today?
 - If not, which elements of this definition are missing in a contemporary view of marriage?
 - How is a marriage affected if a covenant view is replaced by a different view?
- David suggested that a marriage covenant is based on three commitments (which he described as legs on a stool): the commitment *to provide for your partner* (the 'leave' idea from Genesis 2); the commitment *to permanently be faithful to your partner* (the 'cleave / unite' idea from Genesis 2) and the commitment *to sexual union as a way of expressing the exclusive union and of producing children for God's family* (the 'one flesh' idea from Genesis 2).

Leaders: feel free to be selective and creative with your use of these notes.

Don't feel you have to use all of the material, but do try to keep the shape of Review – Read – Reflect – Respond and **DO make room for the 'And Finally' questions!**

Thornbury Baptist Church:

Following the Way of Jesus: Loving God - Loving One Another - Loving Neighbour & World

- How do these three together provide the basis for a rich marriage, and for human happiness?
 - Which of these 'legs' is under most stress in today's world?
 - Read the words of the marriage service (reprinted below). Which phrases in the service describe each of the three commitments listed above? (e.g. which words speak of 'leaving', which of 'cleaving' and which of 'one flesh'?)

 - Jesus said that God permitted divorce because of the hardness of people's hearts (19:8).
 - What do you think he meant by that?
 - How does 'hard heartedness' contribute to divorce?
 - Why would God free people from a marriage where one of the partners was 'hard hearted'?

 - David suggested that there were three circumstances in which the Bible sanctioned divorce:
 - Adultery (Matthew 19:9)
 - Abandonment (1 Cor 7:15)
 - Neglect / Abuse (Exodus 21:10-11)
 - Why do these three in particular break the marriage covenant and permit divorce?
 - Might there be other Biblical reasons that Christians would consider divorce as an option for ending a marriage?

 - Based on this session, how would you help someone who:
 - Is unhappy in their marriage because her husband is spending too much time at work and in leisure pursuits with his friends?
 - Has had an affair which has led to a separation from their wife, and is now wanting to be reconciled?
 - Is considering remarriage after a divorce?
- Think about how different (or not) the answers would be if this was a non-Christian friend on your frontline, or a Christian friend within the church.

And finally:

As you conclude, ask each person:

- What is the main thing you are taking away as an action point?
- How can we pray for you?
- Is there anything we can check on next time we meet?

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Church of England Marriage Service

N, will you take N to be your wife?
Will you love her, comfort her, honour and protect her,
and, forsaking all others,
be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

I, N , take you, N ,
to be my wife,
to have and to hold
from this day forward;
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,
till death us do part;
according to God's holy law.
In the presence of God I make this vow.

N, I give you this ring
as a sign of our marriage.
With my body I honour you,
all that I am I give to you,
and all that I have I share with you,
within the love of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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