

Matthew 19:1–15

¹ Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. ² And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

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, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast 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.” ⁷ They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” 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. ⁹ And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” ¹¹ But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. ¹² For 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.”

¹³ Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, ¹⁴ but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” ¹⁵ And he laid his hands on them and went away.

Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

Genesis 2:24

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother
and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one
flesh.

Deuteronomy 24:1–4

¹ “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, ² and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, ³ and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, ⁴ then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

Matthew 5:31–32

³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Let's Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

1. Does your family have any fun, memorable traditions?

Perhaps your family has an inside joke that nobody else would understand. You had to be there. All you need to do is give your sister that look and you two can't stop laughing.

Did your family have a vacation tradition, like always going to a cabin, slope, or staying for a staycation? Always get the same memorabilia, like a group photo or souvenir?

Is there a special meal your mom makes that transports you back to childhood?

Was there a central figure who brought everyone together? Before my grandpa passed, our extended family met at my grandparents' place every Christmas. My grandma prepared food for us to assemble Taiwanese spring rolls. As she kept making more food, the leftovers would go into our spring rolls every day for a whole week.

In this week's sermon, Jesus teaches us about family.

2. What influenced your views on marriage and children?

For many of us, our own families, for better or worse. Some of my extended family decided to never get married because their parents' marriages fell apart. On the other hand, one cousin loved having multiple siblings and dreamed of having lots of kids.

Was popular media a significant factor? For example, many learn about marriage through romantic movies, often creating unhealthy and unrealistic expectations.¹ Did you see how families loved and cared for each other through sitcoms, like Kim's Convenience or Full House? I learned a lot about tough, but loving fathers from Carl Winslow (Family Matters) and Philip Banks (Fresh Prince of Bel Air).

Perhaps you saw how your friends and their parents interacted. I was so surprised to see my high school friend Greg have lively conversations with his parents. They talked about school, the news, and even what songs his dad sang in the operating room (his dad was a surgeon and they sang West Side Story). It made me want to be a dad who could talk freely with his kids.

In this week's passage, Jesus helps dispel some misunderstandings about marriage and children.

3. How were you raised to view marriage and having children?

For some of us, getting married and having 2.5 children was the gold standard of happiness. If you grew up in the Quiverfull or Patriarchy movements you may believe having tons of children is the goal, moms and girls stay at home, and the guys run the family.²

¹ <https://cmr.biola.edu/blog/2019/feb/12/dont-let-hollywood-ruin-your-love-life/>

² <https://www.gotquestions.org/Quiverfull-Patriarchy.html>

Many cultures view getting married and raising children as a duty. You have kids so they can care for you when you're older. Or your parents want to use your kids' achievements to compete with their peers, like some kind of Pokémon for grandparents.

Some see marriage and children as a liability. What if you find a better guy or girl? What if the type of person you want now isn't what you want in the future? If you have kids, you'll lose your freedom and money. Seriously, life is expensive!

In this week's passage, Jesus presents a brief, but profound presentation of God's design for marriage and children.

Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

4. How does divorce in Jesus' time compare with our modern views? (In Canada or your country of origin.)

Jesus' Time. As Pastor Ray mentioned, Jewish religious scholars had interesting views on divorce. Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel were two major religious schools of thought during Jesus' time.)

Beit Shammai say: A man may not divorce his wife unless he finds out about her having engaged in a matter of forbidden sexual intercourse ... as it is stated: "Because he has found some unseemly matter in her

And Beit Hillel say: He may divorce her even due to a minor issue, e.g., because she burned or over-salted his dish, as it is stated: "Because he has found some unseemly matter in her," meaning that he found any type of shortcoming in her.

Rabbi Akiva says: He may divorce her even if he found another woman who is better looking than her and wishes to marry her, as it is stated ... : "And it comes to pass, if she finds no favor in his eyes". (Gittin 90a)

What struck me when reading their reasoning was how much they focused on the technical meaning of the language with no thought on God's greater designs of marriage.

Canada. Divorce is declining. One factor is that more people choose common-law unions (23% of couples), often seeing it as "trial marriage".³ According to Canadian Law, one must demonstrate that their marriage "has broken down in one of three ways: you and your spouse have separated and have lived apart for at least one year; or your spouse has been physically or mentally cruel to you, making it intolerable to continue living together; or your spouse has committed adultery."⁴ The last figures recorded by the Canadian government (2005) show most divorces are from living apart (95%), followed by adultery (3%), mental cruelty (1%), and physical cruelty (1%).⁵

Other Countries. I couldn't research every country, but here are some things I found.

Brazil's divorce rate is declining, but overall trends "[point] out that marriages are getting shorter. ... one can perceive the increase in the percentage of marriages that end before ten years in the majority of regions. It is a

³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-divorce-rate-1.7189093>

⁴ <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/fact4-fiches4.html>

⁵ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3910003401>

cultural change, of customs and values. Marriages are no longer seen as something that lasts forever and having children is not a deterrent factor to divorces anymore.”⁶

In China, the marriage rate is dropping while the divorce rate is skyrocketing. There’s even a growing divorce industry, with companies doing wedding *and* divorce photography or destroying wedding photos.⁷

In Korea, divorce has been on the rise and is no longer shameful. There are even hit TV shows about divorce like We Got Divorced (<https://youtu.be/7YNhRRM38Ms>) and Between Marriage and Divorce (https://youtu.be/v0HWwVKz4_k).

5. Why is a loose definition of marriage dangerous for those involved or a society?

As Pastor Ray said, “Our society would like us to believe that our emotional needs, physical desires, and fluid identities are of utmost importance.” When marriage is all about getting whatever I want, marriage becomes completely self-serving instead of a mutually beneficial relationship to glorify God.

6. Why can leaving father and mother to start a new family be difficult?

Here are two common factors.

Cultural traditions might consider the heavy involvement of in-laws and extended family in a married couple’s life as normal.⁸ The older generation may feel the need to continue their authority and leadership instead of encouraging the next generation’s autonomy.

Multigenerational households (where three or more generations live together) are the fastest-growing household type.⁹ It used to be more common with new immigrants, but the ridiculously expensive housing market is making it a necessity for many families. It’s hard to run your own family when your parents are right there.

Let’s Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.

7. How can being single be advantageous to following and serving God?

We know of the many blessings that marriage and having families bring. Sadly, our society often neglects the blessings of being single, treating singles as incomplete or inadequate. When one of my cousins got married, his father told him he was finally a man, even though he was already 38 years old! But Jesus and Paul were both single and neither was incomplete or inadequate!

⁶ <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/en/agencia-news/2184-news-agency/news/33004-in-the-middle-of-the-pandemic-number-of-divorces-drops-13-6-in-2020>

⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/19/business/china-divorce-business-benefit-intl-hnk/index.html>

⁸ <https://nestmatrimony.com/blog/2024/11/12/how-family-influence-affects-matrimonial-choices-in-different-cultures-nest-matrimony>

⁹ <https://broadview.org/why-multigenerational-households-have-increased>

Pastor Ray said single people “can live with undivided devotion, with their eyes fixed on Jesus, embracing their kingdom calling and gifting, running the race before them with joy.” Here are some ways it plays out:

Focus. Marriage takes work. Parenting takes work. They’re good and God-given, but I have to dedicate lots of time and energy, drawing greater boundaries and reallocating brain-power that would be used elsewhere. Single people can focus on loving and serving God (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

Flexible Time. When I was single, I could attend and participate in whatever I wanted. Worship night at another church? Game night? Need to stay late to prep my lesson? Someone in a bad place and needing care? Sure, let’s go! I’ll be there! Single adults can have relatively flexible schedules.

Flexible Relationships. As Pastor Ray mentioned, single people still have a spiritual family with lots of spiritual parents, siblings, and children. They’re able to seek and build relationships with a variety of people to both bolster their own walk with God and serve others.

Ministering to Singles. I didn’t meet my wife until I was 35. It was hard sometimes to find support from those who married young because they didn’t get it. (My *younger* brother got married at 25!) They didn’t understand the loneliness of always coming home to an empty home or the depression of seeing all the people you grew up with getting married. I wish I had spiritually and emotionally healthy single guys to walk with me as well as older singles to tell me that Jesus can bring joy and fulfillment, even in singleness.

8. **Pastor Ray’s grandfather said, “Before marriage, you ask yourself if your girlfriend or fiancé is the right one, but after the wedding day, you make her the right one. More importantly, make yourself the right one for her.” Whether single or married, how can you make yourself the right one?**

When I was single and on the hunt, I picked up many hobbies, hoping that some cute girl would be impressed. (Mitzi, my wife, is not impressed with any of them.) Looking back, I’m glad I learned and did them, but I realized I missed bigger things, like pursuing Godly character, understanding God’s design for marriage, finding Godly mentors/community, and more. It’s not too late, because God is helping me to pursue those things now.

For those pursuing a relationship, the best way to know if that guy or gal is the right one is to *be* the right one. When you’re on the same page as God, you can assess with God’s criteria. If you’re growing in Jesus, you’ll be drawn toward someone doing the same. You can easily filter out those who aren’t. If you aren’t growing in Jesus, it doesn’t matter if the other person is or isn’t. You’re the wrong one. As Pastor Ray recommends, check out Ephesians 5:22-33 to see what a godly spouse looks like.

So, what can you do? Do you need to grow in your understanding of God’s idea for marriage? Check out our **Marriage and Family Resources** at the end of the notes for help.

**9. Pastor Ray said, "Jesus is committed to our healing and restoration, including the area of sexual brokenness."
Who in your life needs to hear this?**

Perhaps we've had a string of sexual partners and now suffer from the emotional and physical toll it's taken. We've done something we know God disproves; can He still love me?

Do we know people with failing or failed marriages? Some of them may be victims or perpetrators of adultery, abuse, or negligence. How can Jesus restore them?

Praise God that Jesus' death on the cross covers *all* sins and He can heal all brokenness!

Check out the [Marriage and Family Resources](#) for help in these areas!

10. What about children makes them good candidates for God's Kingdom?

Not everything children do is good for God's kingdom, like public nose-picking, putting random things in mouths, or climbing onto unstable surfaces. But there are some good things we can learn. Here are some attributes that Pastor Ray listed:

- Because children know they need help (they're humble)
- Because they're open to new things (not like the hard-hearted Pharisees)
- Because they wonder and are curious
- Because they often have great faith.

Why are they good for all believers to embody and how can we move in that direction?

11. How can we support those who have experienced the brokenness and hurt of divorce?

As Pastor Ray said, Jesus still cares for them, wanting their protection, healing, and restoration. No matter whose fault it was, there's hope in Jesus. He died on the cross for everyone, married, single, divorced, and more. So how can we assure them of Jesus' love and restoration?

Check out [Marriage and Family Resources](#) at the end of the notes for options.

12. How can we help the children in our lives experience Jesus?

We all have kids in our lives, whether they're our biological/legal children or not. We may have younger siblings or friends/relatives with children. We have lots of kids and teens at Willingdon.

Here are some suggestions based on Pastor Ray's statement: "As a church family, we seek to follow Jesus' example. We welcome, love, teach, disciple, and bless children. We seek to support you, their parents, in every way, as you seek to disciple your children toward the heart of Jesus."

Set an example. As you follow Jesus, you'll set an example. They'll see your Christlike heart and passion for loving the way Jesus loves. You may not know it, but children can see it. Let them see the joy of following Jesus, whether we're single, married, or it's complicated.

Welcome. I've often seen kids bored on their phones on Sundays with nothing to do. Let children know they're welcome on Sundays, at Life Groups, and elsewhere. They have a place here. They aren't tagalongs or +1 guests. Jesus welcomes them as much as He welcomes the adults.

Love. Try to learn their love languages (<https://youtu.be/m5mYQQ-XQvA>) and find an appropriate way to love them. Jesus demonstrated His love by dying on the cross for them. How can we also demonstrate Jesus' love for them? There's the expression, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Teach and Disciple. Volunteer with our children and youth ministry! God's blessed Willingdon with a huge Kids Ministry and Student Ministry. That means we need so many adults to teach and disciple them. Pastor Jono and Pastor Mark are always looking for more volunteers. Did you know Pastors Mark, Jono, and Brody grew up in Willingdon Church? We also have other staff, elders, and volunteers who started as children here, and by God's grace, they have become integral to making our church flourish. Who knows? The students and children you teach could be future pastors, elders, worship team leaders, volunteer coordinators, Life Group Leaders, custodians, nursery volunteers, missionaries, and more!

Bless. What's one of the best ways to bless someone? Pray that God would bless them! Let's pray for the children we see. Pray for the parents to have strength, wisdom, and grace to raise their kids. Pray that God would continually provide a Godly community. Pray that God would protect them from the physical and cultural dangers around them. Pray that they will know Jesus Christ died for their sins and believe in Him. Pray that they would become men and women of God.

Support Parents. If you're an experienced parent, you can provide knowledge and experience to younger parents. When I was single, I used to volunteer to babysit so parents could participate in Bible studies and other events.

Marriage and Family Resources at Willingdon Church

Marriage and Divorce

Marriage Prep Course – <https://willingdon.org/marriage/prep-course/>

Christian Dating & Marriage Course – <https://willingdon.org/events/christian-dating-and-marriage/>

Marriage Enrichment Course – kchan@willingdon.org

Marriage Counseling – ilee@willingdon.org

Divorce Care – <https://willingdon.org/divorce-care/>

Betrayal and Beyond – For women who have experienced betrayal and broken trust in relationships or marriage.

<https://willingdon.org/betrayal-and-beyond/>

Pure Desire – For men seeking healing from sexual brokenness. <https://willingdon.org/pure-desire>

Families with Children

Family Ministries – <https://willingdon.org/ministries/#family>

Mom's Connect – For moms to meet mid-week to worship, pray, and study God's Word.

<https://willingdon.org/moms-connect/>