

# SERMON ON THE MOUNT

*a 10 minute daily devotional | week 5*

## *thursday | prayer*

Spend 10 minutes praying for marriages. Here's a prayer to get you started: "Heavenly Father, Help us treasure the gift of marriage that reflects the love of Christ for the Church, where the self-giving love of husband and wife unites them more perfectly and cooperates in your plan for new life created in your image. Help us support men and women in their vocation of marriage, especially in difficult times when they join their sufferings to the Cross. In our society where divorce is a normality, help us uphold the institution of marriage."

## *friday | application*

If you are married, write an encouraging note to your spouse.

If you aren't married, write an encouraging note to a couple you know.

## *saturday | journaling*

Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:31-32.

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

*Matthew 5:31-32*

## monday | devotional

In college I took quite a few psychology and counseling classes. As part of one of those classes I was assigned the task of making a genogram. A genogram is basically a family tree that pertains pertinent information for a person's mental health. After making my personal genograph there was something on my chart that left a lasting impression on me. My family tree was filled with divorce. Almost everyone I am close to, even those who have now been remarried for a long time, went through a divorce at some point in their lives. This wasn't surprising information, I already knew it, but looking at it on paper had a profound impact.

Many years ago (like 2007), when I was preaching on Matthew 5:27-30 to our youth group, I tried to find the divorce rate. I thought it would be easy. You've probably heard the stat thrown around that 50% of marriages end in divorce. From what I can tell, this stat isn't true. The real truth is that it is difficult to quantify the divorce rate and people do it in different ways. But if numbers don't tell the story, stories do. It is genuinely surprising to me when I meet someone around my age that doesn't come from a divorced home. The Wall Street Journal seems to confirm that feeling:

“Every generation has its life-defining moments. If you want to find out what it was for a member of the Greatest Generation, you ask: ‘Where were you on D-Day?’ For baby boomers, the questions are: ‘Where were you when Kennedy was shot?’ or ‘What were you doing when Nixon resigned?’ For much of my generation—Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980—there is only one question: ‘When did your parents get divorced?’ Our lives have been framed by the answer. Ask us. We remember everything.”

I don't remember everything, I was three when my parents got divorced, but I do remember all of the consequences.. I remember going from place to place on holidays, I remember the new boyfriends, I remember the pain of leaving my dad's house after the weekend, I remember the custody battle. I remember tension. I remember sadness. Even though it was the only life I knew, I knew it wasn't the way life should be.

College provided me with another unique opportunity. As part of my Pastoral Studies program I had to serve a certain amount of ministry hours at my church. At that time I attended a large church, with a big budget, and a full staff. The church was gracious about trying to find me things to do, but just didn't need me for much. I have no idea how it came up, but there was a divorce recovery class and someone suggested I help facilitate it. Looking back it seems like such a strange idea, a 20 year-old unmarried kid helping women (it was all women) recover from the pain of their divorce. But God can turn ideas that seem crazy, even retrospectively, into life changing experiences. The women in that class were mourning and they were scared their kids would be irreparably damaged. But there I was, a child hurt by divorce, but by God's grace, not devastated by it.

My point in sharing all this is not to make anyone feel guilty. Instead, it is to illustrate that divorce sucks. Like I said, almost everyone I'm close to has been divorced, and they'd tell you the same thing. It leaves a wake of negative consequence. It ruins Christmas.

So, what do we do? Many in my generation are just giving up on marriage. For the first time in our nations history fewer people are married than un married. The marriage rate of Millennials may drop to 70%—Baby Boomers had a 91% rate. There is nothing wrong with not getting married. The Apostle Paul declared this emphatically. But if we do choose to get married, how do we avoid divorce?

Many are turning to cohabitation in hopes that it will help them better gauge compatibility. Cohabitation has increased near 900% over the last 50 years. Two-thirds of couples married in 2012 lived together before they were married. This plan doesn't lower a couple's chances of divorce. In fact, it increases their chance of divorce by 33%.

So, what should we do? We should heed the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:5, where he says, “‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh.” The goal of our marriages shouldn't just be to make them last; the goal of our marriages should be a deeply unified relationship. We should be aiming for all that God wants us to have in our relationships—peace, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, etc. What can you do to move your marriage toward this? What can you do to help another married couple be more unified? One answer to both of these questions is prayer.

Less than 1% of couples who pray together 20 minutes per week get divorced. Prayer is one of the most intimate and unifying activities two people can do together. I had a professor who's plan for discipleship was simply to pray with them. In prayer you hear another person's fears, failures, passions, hopes, and dreams. If you want to have a good marriage, pray.

Consider this: How would your marriage improve if you prayed with your spouse 20 minutes a week?

Not married, consider this? Whose marriages can you spend 20 minutes a week praying for?

## tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read them write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:31-32.

Jesus is quoting, in part, from Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

“Sexual immorality” translates the Greek word *proneia* which is “the most general Greek word for illicit sexual intercourse.”

William Barclay, “To all intents and purposes a woman could not divorce her husband for any reason, and a man could divorce his wife for any cause at all.“

J.I. Packer, “This Law was supposed to deter divorce rather than encourage it since it required a “writing of divorcement”, executed in public.”

William Barclay, “There is no time in history when the marriage bond stood in greater peril of destruction than in the days when Christianity first came into this world. At that time the world was in danger of witnessing the almost total break-up of marriage and the collapse of the home...”

In Matthew 19:1-11 Jesus more fully discusses the topic of divorce.

“Note that Jesus is not saying immorality must lead to divorce, only that it may.”

## wednesday | questions

1. Read Genesis 2:20b-25. What are some ways that God's formation of marriage make the meaning of this passage clearer and stronger?
2. In which ways do your views of marriage and divorce align with Jesus? In which ways do they not?
3. If you're married, what can you do to strengthen unity with your spouse (besides prayer)? If you'd like to be married, what can you do now to strengthen that unity when you do get married? If you're not married (or planning on it), what can you do to help strengthen the unity of a married couple you know?
4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.