

Ice Breaker Question:

In your group, come up with a list of the Top 3 Reasons Why a Marriage Succeeds and the Top 3 Reasons Why a Marriage Fails. Save your list for later.

Read and discuss this week's scripture [Matthew 5:31-37].

1. In your own experience or what you've seen with others, how have you seen the church deal with marriage?
2. In your own experience or what you've seen with others, how have you seen the church deal with divorce?
3. Divorce is a painful topic for all of us. Why do you think Jesus addresses this topic? What might be his underlying message in this short passage?
4. Jesus says to let your yes be yes and your no be no. He tells his followers to keep the oaths or promises they have made. What happens when we keep our promises, or when we don't? How have you seen broken promises affect community? How have you seen churches reconcile from broken promises or broken community?
5. Think of an important promise or vow you have made in the last few months. How will you keep that promise or vow in the coming week? (If married, you could think of one of your marriage vows, and how you will keep it in the coming week.)
6. Now, look back at your list of the Top 3 Reasons Why a Marriage Succeeds and the Top 3 Reasons Why a Marriage Fails. Can you relate these reasons to what Jesus teaches here in the Sermon on the Mount, or what you heard in the sermon on Sunday at ZPC?

Prayer:

Keep the following prayer requests from our church family in mind as you close:

- > Prayers of healing for Karen Cunningham, Carolyn Maddox, Hadley Lehr, and Bryan Dysert.

[Leader's Notes] In studying this week's passage, we had a difficult time finding appropriate questions and answers. One way to think about this passage is to put it into context with the whole of the Sermon on the Mount. How can we be the community which is different from the world – and live closer to the way that Jesus calls us to live? We can reach out to those who are poor in spirit, who are meek, who are persecuted – and treat them the way Jesus would. This includes when we struggle with keeping promises, dealing with divorce, or dealing with lust or resentment, or working on being salt and light. It is in that context that we discuss marriage, divorce, and keeping our vows.

[Question 1] Some have seen the church deal with marriage in a very healthy way – upholding the values of it, doing good premarital counseling, and teaching and supporting marriage. Other churches may be ambivalent about marriage or very black and white on marriage issues.

[Question 2] Different churches deal differently with divorce. Some very conservative churches say that it is sinful for most of those who are divorced to remarry, using this passage as evidence. Some churches don't want to say much at all – because it is too uncomfortable or painful. Other churches offer support groups or talk openly about divorce and work to help those who have experienced divorce.

[Question 3] We believe Jesus addresses divorce because marriage is so important. Verse 31 alludes to the fact that in Jesus' day, some Jewish leaders were very lax on divorce (easy to get a certificate of divorce), while other Jews were more rigorous in their grounds for divorce. It seems Jesus takes a more rigorous view of divorce – that he didn't want it to be easy to get a certificate of divorce because marriage is so important. While Jesus takes a stand on the issue of divorce, he also calls all followers to be compassionate, loving, and gracious.

[Question 4] Our integrity and keeping our word is very important. Instead of swearing to do something, Jesus cautions us to let our yes be yes, and no be no - to keep it simple and straightforward. You might discuss how you have seen how broken promises hurt community and what are some positive ways communities or families have dealt with broken promises or vows.

[Question 5] It may be hard to remember a promise you have made recently. It could be something you promised to try and change for your spouse or a close family member. For those who are divorced, it could be something you promised to your children. For those who are married, it could be how you are carrying out a marriage vow even today. How are you doing on that promise?

[Question 6] Marriages fail and succeed for many reasons. Take your list and see how they relate to what Jesus teaches. For example, if a marriage fails because of anger and bitterness, what would Jesus say about dealing with anger or bitterness? If a marriage succeeds because of selfless love and actions, what would Jesus say about that? You might discuss what Jesus would say about marriages that are lukewarm or stuck.