

What is Marriage ?

Opening: Begin with a brief welcome and prayer to set the tone for the group time.

Overview: When the Pharisees approach Jesus in Matthew 19, they want Him to settle a debate about divorce. Instead of beginning with the circumstances that might end a marriage, Jesus takes them back to the beginning and reminds them of **God's vision for marriage**. Jesus presents marriage as something created and established by God: two people becoming one, joined together by God in a covenant intended to endure. But Jesus also acknowledges the reality of our brokenness. Hardness of heart damages what God designed to be good.

This conversation ultimately points us beyond simply trying harder in our relationships. The gospel reminds us that **"we love because He first loved us"** (1 John 4:19). Whether married, single, dating, divorced, separated, or widowed, our deepest hope is found in the faithful love and grace of Jesus.

Leader Note: Acknowledge that this could potentially feel like a messy conversation for some, but this is a safe place for EVERYONE!

Discussion Questions

CONNECT

- What would you say are some of the biggest misconceptions about marriage in our culture? Where do those misconceptions come from?
- What do you think is the biggest difference between viewing marriage as a covenant instead of a contract?

DISCOVER

Read Together: Matthew 19:3-9 together

Initial observations + Interpreting Scripture:

- **Initial Thoughts:** What stood out to you from this passage or from the sermon?

Jesus Goes Back to the Beginning:

- Why do you think Jesus redirects the conversation towards God's design for marriage instead of simply answering the Pharisees' question?
- When Jesus talks about marriage, He highlights:
 - God as the creator and initiator of marriage
 - Leaving father and mother
 - Two becoming one flesh
 - God joining them together
 - Marriage being intended to endure
 - Which of these stands out most to you, and why? Which of these challenges a worldly/cultural view of marriage the most in your opinion?

Covenant, not a contract:

The message described marriage as a **covenant rather than a contract**. A contract tends to say, *"As long as you uphold your end, I'll uphold mine."* Covenant love reflects the faithful, sacrificial love God has demonstrated toward us.

- How does the Gospel challenge a “What am I getting out of this?” approach to relationships?
 - How does reflecting on Christ love affect the way we choose to love and forgive others?
- Why is “hardness of heart” such an important piece of Jesus’ teaching (vv. 19:7-8)? How can Satan use bitterness and resentment to attack a relationship that God has blessed?

APPLY –

Start with Your Own Heart

- Why is it easier to identify what’s wrong with “them” than it is to ask God to expose what He may want to change in us?
- What is the connection between loving God and loving others well?
- What is one relationship in your life where loving God first could have a significant impact?

RESPOND

These prompts can be used for prayer and introspection. Discuss them together or invite everyone to reflect on them throughout the week.

- **Self-Reflect:**
 - Where has hardness of heart begun to show up in me?
 - How would I love differently this week if I really believed that I am already completely loved by Jesus?

GROUP PRAYER

Pray Together as a Group

Pray:

- **Hearts:** Ask God to reveal areas of hardness, selfishness, bitterness, pride, and unforgiveness and soften our hearts towards Him.
- **Marriages:** Pray that marriages in your group and church would increasingly reflect the faithful, sacrificial, covenant love of Jesus.
- **Struggling Relationships:** Ask God to bring wisdom, healing, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation where relationships have been damaged.
- **Every Season:** Pray for those who are single, dating, engaged, married, separated, divorced, or widowed, to experience the grace, presence, and love of Jesus in their present season.

CLOSING

Remind everyone that as a church, we want to help! Visit gethope.net/marriage for a list of all of our marriage resources or to talk with a pastor.