

God, What Do You Think of Divorce?

Rich Nathan
May 16-17, 2015
God, I Have a Question Series
Matthew 19.1-12

Last year the actress Gwyneth Paltrow

Photo of Gwyneth Paltrow

...introduced the world to a new way of describing divorce. She said on her website that she and her husband, Chris Martin, who as many of you know, is the lead singer of the band Cold Play, were pursuing

Conscious Uncoupling

We've all heard lots of synonyms for divorce. My spouse and I split up. We broke up. We parted ways. We dissolved our marriage. We're splitsville. Our marriage is on the rocks. But until that time very few people had heard the phrase

Conscious Uncoupling

The phrase actually came from a woman named Kathryn Thomas who wrote a book about her own dating and marriage relationship. It was titled

Book Cover – “Calling in ‘The One’: 7 Weeks to Attract the Love of Your Life

Ms. Thomas sold over 100,000 copies of this book about how to find the love of your life in 7 weeks and she became one of those relationship experts that write for magazines like Cosmopolitan and Glamour.

Anyway, Ms. Thomas was having dinner one night with a friend in Hollywood. She was going through her own divorce and he was talking about his divorce. He said he was consciously uncoupling. Ms. Thomas had a eureka moment. She said, “That’s it! Conscious uncoupling. That’s going to be the title of my new book.” And right there at the table she registered that website, Conscious Uncoupling, and she began selling a 5-week course on conscious uncoupling online for \$300. It is all about no-fuss, no-muss divorces – the kind of amicable Hollywood-style divorce that you read about in People Magazine.

But 99% of us don't live in Hollywood. And for most of the rest of us getting divorced is, the hardest life decision that any of us will ever make and the most devastating life decision we will make concerning our kids. And when a person today turns to the church for counsel and direction regarding this massively significant life decision about divorce, that person is going to face a confusing array of counsel depending on the church and the pastor they talk to.

So there is a very prominent Baptist pastor, who is a best-selling author, who has come to the conclusion that there is never a biblical ground for divorce. No divorce...ever...marriage is for life. And there are some churches that teach that the only valid grounds for divorce is adultery and that even if your husband or wife is physically abusing you, or physically abusing your children, you can't get divorced. And there are some churches who say that there are two grounds for divorce in the Bible – adultery and abandonment. And then some churches teach that you can get your marriage annulled and that even if you held yourself out as married for 30 years and have had 3 kids together, if you can show that the marriage fell short of one of the elements of a binding union, you can get your marriage annulled, as if you were never married. And, of course, there are many churches that divorce is simply not an issue. The approach of the church is what someone does in their private life is no one else's business. Judge not and you be not judged.

And, then there are all the sub-categories and permutations of all the positions. You may get divorced, but you can't get remarried in the church building. Or you may get divorced, but you can never remarry unless your ex-spouse dies.

It is no wonder that people are confused. And it is no wonder that folks in Jesus' day were confused because there were all kinds of opinions about divorce in Jesus' day from different rabbis, who went to him and asked him, "What do you think of divorce? When can a person get divorced?"

I've been doing a series after Easter on some of the tough questions that churches tend to avoid – things like may a Christian go to war? A few weeks ago Andy Saperstein did a message titled "How Should Christians Relate to Muslims?" Next week I will be doing a message on "How Should Christians Relate to People from the LGBT Community?" Today, as I continue this series, I've titled my message, "God, What Do You Think of Divorce?" Let's pray.

Matthew 19:1–12 (NIV)

19 When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. 2 Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

4 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

7 “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

8 Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

10 The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

11 Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

It is the rare family that has not been impacted by divorce, if not our own divorce, then the divorce of our parents, or the divorce of our children, or our sisters or brothers. I will not ask for a show of hands regarding how many of you have been impacted by divorce in your own family, but like most of you, I’ve been impacted by divorce of immediate family members including the divorce of my parents. My parents had a terrible marriage. They were two very immature people. There was constant fighting and yelling and cursing and continual accusations of infidelity. There were constant money problems.

But despite all the fighting I witnessed as a child, I didn’t want my parents to get divorced. As a Jewish child I used to pray for them in Hebrew to stay together before I went to bed as I was listening to them fighting. My parent’s divorce became final when I was 14. Like many children of divorce, my life was totally disrupted by my parents’ divorce. We moved out of my house and the neighborhood in the suburbs where I was very happy and had tons of friends and moved into an apartment in NY City where I attended a city high school that was on triple sessions. As a sophomore, I went to high school from 11:30-5:30 in the evening every day. And as a teenager, I had to relate to a new man in the house – my mother’s boyfriend, and his kids.

The worst thing about my parent’s divorce was not us getting rid of our house. It was not me being separated from my friends. It was not even this new guy although all of that was really hard. It was the fact that I no longer had my dad at home, the person with whom I was very close.

So, divorce is something that I know about intimately. It has affected me. And it has affected those I love. And it has affected many of you and those you love. And some of you right now have marriages that are hanging by a thread and you are contemplating getting divorced, or you are actually pursuing divorce.

Now, some of what I have to say today applies only to those who have made a commitment to Christ. Some of what I have to say today only applies to those who have said, “I want Jesus as my Lord and I am committed to listening to him and to obey him even when what he says runs counter to my desires.” And so, in that regard, if you have not yet made a commitment to Christ as your Lord, you are off the hook. But there are other things that I’m going to say today that apply regardless of your faith commitment. And so I pray that the talk will be helpful regardless of your relationship with Christ.

I need to say this one thing at the front end of this talk. That is, I hear from many quarters in the Christian world that the traditional family is under attack from the gay community and that we Christians need to do something about that – this attack on the family from the gay community. Issues of sexuality are not insignificant. They’re important. And I’m going to do a message next week on how we as a church should relate to those in the gay community.

But at the front end of this talk, we need to be honest with one another and say that the great assault on the traditional family is not occurring from the 2-3% of folks who self-identify as gay. One of the greatest threats to the traditional family comes from the millions of heterosexuals who every year decide to divorce.

The reason I stress this is because I have not had one person in the last ten years come to me and say, “Pastor, when are you going to do a message on divorce which is undermining the traditional family in America? When are you going to say something about it?” So we do need to get these threats to the family in order. We need to be careful that we are not guilty in the church of being like the Pharisees, who Jesus said would strain out gnats and swallow camels. We need to be honest about the condition of the church in America, including Vineyard Columbus, and the condition of our own lives.

Having said all of that,

Why get divorced?

Some churches, as I said, suggest that all divorce is illegitimate. A person may never get divorced...for any reason. To this, I would simply respond and say,

God is a divorcee

One of the most striking pictures of God in the Old Testament is that God is a divorcee. We know God by different titles in the Bible. We call God our Father. We call God King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We call God Almighty, our Friend, and the Lover of our souls, Healer, Redeemer, and the One Who Sees Us. But have you ever said, “God, you are a Divorcee?” That’s what the prophets tell us. For example, here is what we read in Jeremiah 3:6-8.

Jeremiah 3:6–8 (NIV)

6 During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me, “Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there. 7 I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it. 8 I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.

The idea is that God married the nation of Israel through his covenant at Mt. Sinai. He didn’t only give people a bunch of rules to live by. The Old Testament was a type of marriage covenant. God became husband and the people of Israel his wife. But over the years the people of Israel strayed. They were faithless to their marriage partner and they committed spiritual adultery by turning from their husband, God, and worshipping idols. And even though God forgave them over and over again, the people of Israel were hard-hearted and refused to repent of their adultery.

And so God reluctantly divorced them and sent the nation of Israel off into exile.

Now, if you are a reluctant divorcee, if you were divorced against your wishes, or like God you initiated divorce proceedings because your spouse was hard-hearted and refused to repent despite repeated appeals and repeated grants of forgiveness, God understands how you feel because God himself was a reluctant divorcee.

So, obviously, not all divorce is unbiblical or illegitimate. God, himself, was a reluctant divorcee. And second,

People may divorce

Some people read Matthew 19:6,

Matthew 19:6 (NIV)

6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

They’ve translated it into no one can separate. In other words, some people have said that once you’re married, you are married for life. You cannot undo the marriage bond. Jesus didn’t say you cannot divorce, it’s impossible to divorce, once you’re married,

you're married in God's eyes. He didn't say that. He said you should not divorce. Jesus is not saying divorce can't happen. He is saying divorce shouldn't happen. He recognizes that it does happen. In this fallen broken world, divorce does happen.

A huge part of the confusion over the question of divorce and remarriage in the church concerns what the Pharisees were actually asking Jesus in Matthew 19.3.

Matthew 19:3 (NIV)

3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

I'm indebted to a great New Testament scholar named Dr. David Instone-Brewer for an understanding of this text that is rooted in a deep appreciation of the Jewish world of Jesus' day. Dr. Instone-Brewer is a great scholar of ancient Israelite divorce and marriage laws. He wrote a book a few years ago titled Divorce and Remarriage in the Church.

Photo of Book Cover – Divorce and Remarriage in the Church by David Instone-Brewer

What Instone-Brewer tells us is that the way the rabbis in ancient Israel and even orthodox rabbis today interpreted a particular law regarding divorce in the Old Testament,

Deuteronomy 24:1 (NIV)

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,

Was that men and only men could initiate a divorce

"For any cause"

Many religions have permitted men to easily walk away from their marriage vows. No fault divorce has been the rule in Islam. There was a recent story about a man in Dubai, who divorced his wife by a totally new method. He sent her a text message by phone. She had failed to show up on time to make his tea and so he texted her and said, "You're late; I divorce you." And because this was the third time that he told his wife that he would divorce her, according to Islamic law, if a man tells his wife "I divorce you" three times, this is all that's needed. "I divorce you." "I divorce you." "I divorce you" even for something as simple as failing to make my tea on time. I'm out.

Now, what Instone-Brewer points out is there was a dispute in Jesus' day about the meaning of the Old Testament law that comes from Deuteronomy 24.1 where a man divorces his wife for a "cause of sexual immorality."

Deuteronomy 24:1

When a man takes a wife and marries her, if she then finds no favor in his eyes because he has found a cause of sexual immorality in her,...he writes her a certificate of divorce.

Rabbi Hillel asked why did Moses use the phrase "a cause of sexual immorality" when he could have simply said, "sexuality immorality". Hillel reasoned that the reason "cause" must refer to something different than immorality. He concluded that divorce was permissible

For any cause

For example, if his wife burned his toast, or if she failed to serve him in some way, a husband could divorce his wife. So there was great debate during Jesus' day about this so-called "any cause" divorce. What do you think, Jesus? Do you agree with Rabbi Hillel's interpretation of Deuteronomy 24.1? In other words, that a man can divorce his wife not only for sexual immorality, but also for any cause at all?

Now in ancient Israel, both a husband and a wife could divorce each other for violating their written marriage contract. The marriage contract specifically obliged married couples to provide food, clothing, and conjugal love to each other, and to also avoid committing adultery. In Jesus' day, if you threatened your spouse's physical person by failing to provide for their physical needs, if you failed to provide conjugal love to your spouse, if you committed adultery, you could get divorced. And this was available to both the husband and the wife.

Jesus wasn't asked a question about whether he agreed with those traditional grounds for divorce in the Jewish marriage. He was asked a different and much more narrow question: what do you think the proper meaning is of Deuteronomy 24.1 and the phrase "a cause of sexual immorality."

A cause of sexual immorality

Does this open the door, Jesus, for husbands and husbands only to be divorced for any reason they choose from their wives? And Jesus responds and says, "No."

Matthew 19:9 (NIV)

9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

He is not saying the only thing you can get divorced for is adultery. He is not speaking to the larger question regarding whether physical abuse of you or your children could ever be a ground for divorce. He wasn't asked that question. He was asked about the live debate that was going on regarding the proper interpretation of Deuteronomy 24.1 and the phrase "a cause of sexual immorality." Jesus says the meaning is obvious. God is talking about adultery.

And Jesus narrows that Deuteronomy 24.1 door even more when he says,

Matthew 19:8 (NIV)

8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

I believe he is talking about unrepentant adultery – someone who sins sexually and despite confrontation refused to repent. Some folks get a hold of Matthew 19, read it, and say, "Oh, the only possible grounds for divorce is adultery. We're unhappy in our marriage, so I need to search around for some way to charge my spouse with adultery. You know, my wife did commit adultery 25 years ago. I guess that's my get out of jail free card! Well, my husband occasionally looks at pornography. That's adultery. Well, my wife admitted to an emotional affair with a coworker. That's adultery. Don't be a Pharisee regarding your marriage. Don't search around for some ground for divorce.

Yes, if your spouse is hard-hearted and refuses to repent; if you're living in a situation that is dangerous for you and your children; your spouse is engaged in unrepentant adultery; your spouse refuses to provide the basic necessities of life – food, clothing and shelter, because they simply will not work, not they cannot work because of a disability, or they cannot find work; or your spouse is spending you into the poor house so that you cannot live – yes, you may get divorced. God was a reluctant divorcee and you may be a reluctant divorcee in this fallen world. All divorce is not sin. And divorce or unbiblical groups is not the unforgiveable sin. Like every other sin, the death of Christ is sufficient to pay for the sin of divorce.

Let me move to something more positive. That is how do we not get divorced?

How to not get divorced

The good news is that the divorce rate in America is going down. Believe it or not, divorce rates have steadily fallen over the last 30 years and have gone down by about 30% from their peak in 1979. But there is still an epidemic of divorce. What I'm about to say is particularly relevant if you are single. You want to improve your odds of marital success?

If you want to improve your odds of success, one of the things you can do is

Choose well

Divorce	Marital Success
	Choose well

Listen up, single people. Listen up especially 20 and 30-somethings: who may wish to marry and want to improve your chance of not getting divorced in the future. Make a good married choice in the beginning. Marry the right person. You say, “How do I do that?”

Well, there are no guarantees, of course. But some of the factors in choosing the right person include not marrying someone who has unaddressed personal or behavioral problems. If you are considering marrying someone who has a history of drug abuse, who has a history of alcoholism, or has a history of having problems holding a job, or has a history of having problems with sexual integrity, or has a history of financial management problems, or has a history with telling the truth, if you are considering marrying someone who has significant psychological or emotional problems and you think that getting married is going to fix this history, there are millions of people who will line up and tell you, “Honey, you need to take your head out of the sand.” Standing up and getting married doesn’t fix a drinking problem, or an addiction problem, or an anger problem, or a problem of lying or a problem of being unable to hold a job, or a significant psychological problem.

I’m not saying that anyone who has ever had a history of significant problems can never be married. All of us have a history. What I am saying is that before you say yes to a marriage proposal, or before you make a marriage proposal, you ought to observe a radical change of behavior for a significant time not less than a year or two of walking in complete freedom. Yes, they used to have money management problems, but that is totally changed and has been changed month after month after month. Yes, they used to have an anger problem, but that is no longer part of their lives. They used to drink, but they are completely free and they’ve been walking in sobriety for several years.

Choose someone who shares your faith commitment. People who share a faith commitment to Christ have a much higher rate of marital success.

If you want to improve your chances of marital success, choose well at the beginning.

Second, and related to this,

Listen to advice

Divorce	Marital Success
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	Success
	Choose well
	Listen to advice

Proverbs 15.22 says:

Proverbs 15:22 (NIV)

22 Plans fail for lack of counsel,
but with many advisers they succeed.

Whenever I do premarital counseling, one of the first questions I ask a couple is this: What do those who are closest to you say about your choice of this other person? Is there anyone in your closest circle who is raising a red flag and saying, “Hey, this is not a good choice. Don’t do this.”

Well, yes, my parents are totally against this marriage. My father and mother begged me to not marry him. My friends are really concerned about this. My small group leader has taken me aside and said, “I don’t think this is a good thing.” But, pastor, they don’t see what I see in him. They’re not seeing that underneath that lump of coal is a diamond.”

Friends, do you know what the book of Proverbs calls someone who doesn’t listen to advice. Proverbs calls that person a fool.

Let’s admit that when we human beings fall in love, we go temporarily insane. We lose our capacity for judgment. And so you say, “I’ve gone temporarily insane; I need to listen to sane people, who are not in love with this person that I’m seeing.” Listen to advice.

Here in the church we are committed as a church community to try to provide you with the very best counsel and chance of marital success that we can. We have a class that’s coming up called

How-2-Become-1 – Saturday, June 20- August 1, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 Noon

It’s a premarital class and is open to all dating relationships – couples who are considering engagement, engaged couples. You can register online. For more information you can contact

Mindy Layman at mindy.layman@vineyardcolumbus.org

You can find out about all of our classes through our Marriage and Family Ministry by simply going online at

www.vineyardcolumbus.org

...and looking at the upcoming classes because we probably have something for you.

Choose well. Listen to advice. Here's the third thing:

Go slow

Divorce	Marital Success
	Choose well
	Listen to advice
	Go slow

Andrew Cherlin is one of America's preeminent scholars on the subject of marriage and the state of contemporary marriage in America. He wrote a best-selling book a few years ago titled The Marriage-Go-Round.

Photo of Book Cover – The Marriage-Go-Round by Andrew Cherlin

Andrew Cherlin described relationships in America as

Easy in, easy out

That compared to the rest of the world, Americans rush into relationships, move in together real quickly, we marry quickly, and then we rush out of relationships quickly. Easy in, easy out. Andrew Cherlin, when asked if he had one bit of advice for 21st century Americans about marriage, said, "Go slow. Spend a long time getting to know this other person. Don't rush into marriage."

Don't ask a person to marry you on the third date, or say yes to a marriage proposal after a month. Go slow. Don't rush into living together. Do you know that couples who live together before they get married have a lower chance of future marital success than if you only live together after you are married and wait until you are a little more mature. Your chance of staying married markedly increases if you get married after the age of 23. Go slow.

Here is the fourth thing. If you want to improve your chance of marital success,

Understand marriage's purpose

Divorce	Marital Success
	Choose well
	Listen to advice
	Go slow
	Understand Marriage's Purpose

Jesus doesn't spend a lot of time talking about the grounds for divorce like the Pharisees. But he does talk about marriage's purpose. He says, if you want to stay married,

Matthew 19:4–6 (NIV)

4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

The purpose of marriage is two people becoming one. Here's the idea. Way back in creation, we read this lovely story of the creation of woman. It says that God took the man, put him to sleep, performed an operation on him and from his side, created woman. Do you know what marriage is? Marriage is a reverse operation by God. Marriage is God opening us up again and pushing this person inside of us again. It is the reversal of the original creation. Marriage is a lifelong operation by God of having another person pushed back into your side.

And like every operation, it's painful. If you are a person who wants your space all the time, don't get married. If you are a person who insists on your independence all the time, don't get married. If you are a person who doesn't like pain, don't get married because what God is doing in marriage day by day is he is opening up your side and he is pushing this other person in so that two become one.

Choose well. Listen to advice. Go slow. Understand marriage's purpose.

You're listening to me and you might have two reactions. You might say, "Rich, I did all those things and my marriage is still breaking down. I did go slow. I did listen to people. I did get counsel. I tried to make a wise choice and things are still not working. "Now what, pastor?"

Or your reaction might be, "I didn't do any of those things. I got married young. I married for all the wrong reasons. I wanted to get away from my home. I didn't look at the red flags. Now what?"

If your marriage isn't working,

Why not get divorced

Do not apply what I am about to say, if you or your children are living in a dangerous situation. If you are living with an abuser, if you are living in a situation that endangers you, or your children, you need to get out. Do not apply what I am about to say, if you are in a dangerous situation.

The surveys say that the vast majority of bad marriages aren't dangerous ones. And if you are in a bad marriage that does not endanger you or your children, it's just really not working, why not get divorced? Let me close with three things.

Number 1:

For the sake of your kids

Now, do not dismiss this reason for staying together out of hand as many of us are prone to do! Americans were recently asked, "Do you believe that marriage is for life?" 3 out of 4 Americans of every stripe, religious, irreligious, and everything in between, said, "Yes. Marriage is for life." If you go anywhere in the world, the vast majority of people believe that marriage is for life.

So the survey asked a follow up question: Do you believe that even if your marriage is unhappy, you should stay together for the sake of your kids? Only 1 out of 4 Americans said yes.

So, on the one hand we've got this marriage culture; on the other hand, it collides with a culture of individualism. 3 out of 4 marriages for life; only 1 out of 4 says that even if you are unhappy, you should stay together for the sake of your kids.

Should you stay together for the sake of your kids?

Judith Wallerstein, who was a psychologist from the University of Berkley, along with her colleagues, did a 25 year study on the legacy of divorce and its impact on children. What she and her colleagues did was to compare two groups of children – one group were children of divorce and the second group were children of intact families. The children ranged in age from 3-18 years old. Toddlers to high school seniors. They controlled four things like income, neighborhood and education, all of that. Two groups – children of divorced parents, children of intact families. Judith Wallerstein and her colleagues followed these kids for 25 years. Every 5 years they did an intensive study of the kids. Dozens and dozens of hours of interviews. What did they find?

The Effects of Divorce

Little ones, ages 2-6, are terrified of abandonment. Elementary school kids grow resentful. Pre-adolescent and teens get seduced by what Judith Wallerstein calls “the voice of the street. They are pulled into destructive behaviors.

They found that children of divorce suffered profoundly as a result of their parents’ divorce. Overnight children had to adjust to an entirely new relationship to their parents. Often they had to be relocated to a new neighborhood, to a new school. They lost friendships, they had to readjust their activities. They missed their dads or moms.

Long-term Wallerstein found that children of divorce had a hard time in their adult relationships, and especially in their relationships of love and commitment. They learned early on from their parents that no matter what your parents say about commitment, commitment is unreliable. That even the closest family relationships can break down.

Folks used to believe that before the Wallerstein study that if mommy or daddy were unhappy in their marriage, the kids would be unhappy. But if mommy and daddy got divorced and they became happy, the kids would become happy. Hard as it is to believe, friends, our kids don’t care one whit about our self-actualization or our happiness. I know this is hard to believe. But it is true. The child growing up in your home is not asking: Is my mommy happy, or is my daddy happy? Dos my mom or dad feel loved by their partner? Your child is asking: Am I happy? Am I safe? Am I secure? Do I get to relate to my mommy and daddy, or are they going to introduce someone new into my life that I’ve got to learn how to relate to?

I’m going to start posting the studies that I quote in my messages online. It is amazing that I haven’t done this before. But I’m going to start doing this. Week by week I frequently will cite a study. If you are interested in this kind of thing, or in a particular quote or study, I’m going to start posting things online. So I will be posting this Judith Wallerstein study, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A Report of a 25-Year Study*.

Here is the second thing. Why not get divorced?

For the sake of your happiness

Everyone wants to be happy. Anyone here not want to be happy?

There was an incredible study done a few years ago from a team of family scholars chaired by Linda Waite, of the University of Chicago. The study was simply called “Does Divorce Make People Happy?” We know, friends, that the goal of life in 21st century America is happiness. Everyone wants to be happy. So the question that is simply asked by this study is: does divorce make adults happier than staying in an unhappy marriage?

What they did in this study was to compare two groups of people – those who were unhappily married and decided to stay married, and those who were unhappily married and decided to get divorced. The conventional wisdom is that if you are unhappily married and you get divorced, that you will become happier. An unhappy marriage takes a toll on your emotions, your psychological being. And if you get out of that situation, you will become happier. If you stay in, you'll just spiral down. But if you get out, you will be less depressed, have greater self-esteem.

Do you know what they discovered? They discovered that

- Unhappily married adults who divorced or separated were not happier, on average, than unhappily married adults who stayed married

There is a reason for this. Divorce has its own set of stressors. You might have to hassle with a vindictive ex-spouse, who is dragging you to court every other month. If you have children, you might have to deal with custody issues. You might have financial stress. If you get involved in a new relationship, there is no guarantee that that relationship is going to work out any better. Unhappily married adults who divorced or separated were no happier on average than unhappily married adults who stayed married.

Here is the second thing:

- Unhappily married adults who divorced or separated were not happier, on average, than unhappily married adults who stayed married.
- 2/3 unhappily married adults, who avoided divorce, ended up happily married 5 years later.

Marriages do improve. On Monday evening here at Vineyard we are going to be offering a seminar titled

Lifelong Marriage Is Not a Myth: How to Stand Strong For Your Marriage in Our Culture - Monday, May 18th, 7:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m. at the Cooper Road Campus

The seminar is going to be about how to achieve satisfaction and greater levels of happiness in marriage.

But your marriage can turn around. Most unhappy marriages do. There is huge hope for unhappy marriages. That's what the studies say.

Here is the third thing.

- Unhappily married adults who divorced or separated were not happier, on average, than unhappily married adults who stayed married.

- 2-3 unhappily married adults, who avoided divorce, ended up happily married 5 years later.
- Many currently happily married spouses have had extended periods of marital unhappiness, often for quite serious reasons, including alcoholism, infidelity, verbal abuse, emotional neglect, depression, illness, and work reversals.

Most happily married people have gone through some very difficult issue in their marriage. What kept them going? Why did they stay married?

Why not get divorced? For the sake of your kids. For the sake of your happiness. And finally,

For the sake of your vows

Now, this particularly applies to anyone who is a follower of Christ. Christians are promise-keepers. That's what Jesus says. If you follow Jesus, keep your promises.

You know, friends, we live with an enormous myth that what holds a marriage together is two people staying in love. That's not what holds a marriage together. What holds a marriage together is our vows. We know this is actually the case because even when couples fall out of love, they still have to go to court to disentangle themselves from each other. Why? Its because of these vows. Another way to put it is love is not just an emotion, an experience; love is a promise. Love is a resolve. Love is an act of the will.

We can't in ourselves keep our promises. The only one who keeps all of his promises is God. So if you are wavering on your promise, if you made a vow and you are saying, "I want to get out of it," the answer for you is not try harder. The answer for you is you need the support of the changeless God, who can strengthen your resolve. When you are flagging, when you want to throw in the towel, God can keep you going.

The community that's called the church can keep you going. The church can come alongside of you. The church can help you. The studies are clear, participating in church keeps marriages together. If you are in a small group, your small group can support you. We have a ministry called Marriage and Family that can support you. God loves lifelong marriage. He wants that for you, if you are married. And he sends his people to assist you and to strengthen you when you feel like giving up, God wants you to keep your marriage vows. Let's pray.

God, What Do You Think of Divorce?

Rich Nathan

May 16-17, 2015

God, I Have a Question Series

Matthew 19.1-12

- I. **Why get divorced?**
 - A. God is a divorcee
 - B. People may divorce
- II. **How to not get divorced?**
 - A. Choose well
 - B. Listen to advice
 - C. Go slow
 - D. Understand marriage's purpose
- III. **Why not get divorced?**
 - A. For the sake of your kids
 - B. For the sake of your happiness
 - C. For the sake of your vows