

Series - On Your Mark!

Date/s - 01 July 2018

Topic - Happily Ever After?

Speaker/s - Pastor Ben KC Lee

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like "Holding Nothing Back", "I Have A Song", "Worthy Of It All", "Hosanna (Be Lifted Higher)", or "Worthy Is The Lamb".

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, cell members will:

1. Know God's plan for marriage.
2. Choose to find our contentment and rest in God whether married or single.

Word [45 min]

This week's sermon is based on Chapter 10:1-12 of the Gospel of Mark, within the broader context of Chapters 8 through 11, which talk about *discipleship*. Therefore, God's teaching on marriage in Mark, Chapter 10, is within the context of discipleship.

A disciple of Christ is one who has no claim on his own life – he belongs to Jesus, his Lord. What does this mean? Just as we belong to our Lord Jesus, our marriages also belong to Him. In Mark 10:1-12, Jesus is being questioned about His position on marriage and divorce.

Pastor Ben breaks down his sermon into 3 key points:

1) Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? (vv. 1 – 2)

The short and clear answer is found in Malachi 2:16 – "I hate divorce," says the Lord".

God never intended divorce as part of His will. Pastor Ben reminds us that divorce does not solve problems – instead it usually creates new and often more complex ones. Instead of trying to use divorce as an "escape hatch" to exit a difficult marriage, we should instead be asking God what His desire and will is for us as His children. Is the difficult marriage intended to draw us closer to God? Is it intended to teach us what it means to love unconditionally?

2) Jesus emphasizes marriage and God's plan in marriage (vv. 3 – 9)

When the Pharisees questioned Jesus on His views regarding divorce (v. 2), they wanted to know what Jesus thought were legitimate grounds for divorce. Instead of directly answering their question, Jesus pointed them to the very heart of the issue: God's principles regarding marriage, and His plan for marriage.

There are 2 aspects to this:

- a. Forgiveness overcomes the hardness of heart (vv. 3 – 5). In Deuteronomy 24:1-4, the Mosaic law states that a man can divorce his wife if he “finds something indecent about her”. In Biblical times, there were 2 main schools of interpretations about what “something indecent” entailed.

The *lenient interpretation* was that anything the husband found displeasing with his wife (e.g., she accidentally burns his dinner) could count as something “indecent”, and the man could legally divorce his wife on these grounds.

The *strict interpretation* refers “something indecent” specifically to sexual immorality. According to this interpretation, only if the wife was caught in sexual immorality could the husband divorce her.

The Pharisees wanted to know which interpretation Jesus aligned Himself to. But Jesus knew better. He did not respond directly but cut straight to the heart of the matter and pointed out that Deut 24:1-4 was not even talking about legitimising divorce. Moses gave this law because of the sinfulness of the human condition and the hardness of the human heart. This law protected women and children from being treated as property, easily disposed of at the man’s pleasure (or displeasure).

The fact is, God never intended for divorce in the first place.

Many times, a hardness of heart causes us to sin against our spouse or to withhold forgiveness from him/her. What does it take to soften our hearts then? A heart is always soft when it i) recognises its inability to handle a situation, and ii) relies on the wisdom and power of God. The humility that these heart-postures bring about will keep us resolute in our fight to maintain our marriages instead of entertaining thoughts about divorce. Let us pray that God will remove our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

- b. Upholding God’s original intent for marriage (vv. 6 – 9). What, in the first place, is God’s original intention for marriage? Pastor Ben talks about the following 4 points that define God’s intention for marriage:
- i. *Marriage is between a man and a woman (v. 6) for one lifetime.*
 - ii. *Marriage requires total commitment (v. 7).* Marriage is unitive. It unites 2 persons, both forsaking their singleness and practicing total commitment to each other.
 - iii. *Marriage is the most intimate union in the human race (v. 8).* It brings 2 persons together in one flesh. Because of the closeness of the intimacy of marriage, divorce is so painful – like ripping apart 2 halves, or an amputation.
 - iv. *Marriage is God’s own work (v. 9).* God created marriage, owns marriage, sets the rules in marriage, and only death ends the sacred marriage covenant. It is not God’s intent for man to break apart His own work.

Pastor Ben exhorts us that the purpose of marriage is to put Christ’s covenant-keeping love and faithfulness on public display (Eph 5: 31-33). Christ’s love for the Church is to be demonstrated to the world through the love between a man and his wife. Marriage is a public symbol of that sacred, unbreakable union that binds Christ and the Church. The marriage of a man and a woman is meant to tell the story of the Gospel, that Christ never breaks His covenant with His Bride.

3) Uphold what God has joined together (vv. 10 – 12).

God’s intention for marriage is one man, one woman, for one lifetime, and Jesus upholds this high principle. However, the Bible does permit divorce on grounds of i) adultery, or ii) abandonment by an unbelieving

spouse.

This however, does not have to mean the end of the marriage, and all effort should be made to reconcile the marriage before using divorce as a very last resort. Reconciliation means that restoration has to be made; the offending party (the one who committed the adultery) has to be genuinely repentant before God and his/her spouse, and true forgiveness has to be extended to that party.

Discussion Questions

General Notes for Leaders: *The structure of the discussion questions are slightly different than usual. The intention of this week's questions is to allow the cell discussions to lay a sure foundation of what the Bible has to say regarding marriage, divorce, and re-marriage. Leaders should be mindful not to be drawn into a debate of what to do in various scenarios of divorce and re-marriage, but instead steer the discussions towards laying a strong foundation of what God desires based on His Word. RiverLife Church's Position Statement on Marriage, Divorce, and Re-Marriage, and Pastoral Response towards Divorce and Re-marriage were handed out during last Sunday's Forum on Divorce and Re-Marriage. If you do not have a copy of these documents, please approach your AO or ZP.*

For cells that have members who are going through or considering the possibility of divorce, RiverLife Church recommends restoration pathways for the couple to explore with all intents and purposes towards restoration. These restoration pathways include pastoral counselling, clinical therapy (psychotherapy), prayer ministry, and medical (psychiatry). Cell leaders, please speak to your AO, ZP or ZO should you require further information or such support for your cell member.

1. **Discussion questions.** [20 min]

Why is divorce such a big deal?

Leader's Notes: *Refer to point 2b: Upholding God's original intent of marriage. See also Malachi 2:16. God never intended divorce as part of His will. Pastor Ben reminds us that divorce does not solve problems – instead it usually creates new and often more complex ones. God's heart for marriage can be described as enduring faithfulness. God's intent never included loopholes, even though our hearts may be hard.*

What are some other examples of enduring faithfulness? What are some other relationships that illustrate unconditional loyalty no matter what?

Leader's Notes: *Members can share any stories they know of their own parents/grandparents/relatives/etc that exemplify unconditional loyalty. This would reinforce in members' minds that a successful marriage is indeed possible. It is possible in our fallen state that the life experiences of members are filled with more negative examples than positive ones. Leaders can draw members to focus on Jesus' love for the His people, which is what marriage is a foreshadow of. See Romans 8:38-39 on God's faithfulness and His unconditional loyalty.*

2. **Application questions.** [20 min]

Leader's Notes: *Use the following questions as relevant to your cell profile. Do be sensitive if you have cell members who have gone through/are going through divorce/re-marriage. Remind and encourage your cell members that **divorce or marriage does not give you your identity. Jesus gives you your identity. This means that when God looks from heaven, He does not have three categories: single, married and divorced. God only has two categories: single and married.***

**For Singles: Do you have a biblical view of marriage? Do you see singleness as a gift from God?
How is your marriage with God?**

For Married: Have you thanked God for your marriage? Do you need to repent or turn from mistrust of God within your marriage? Are you willing to fight for your marriage?

For Divorced: Have you grieved your loss? Have you considered and prayed for restoration of your former marriage? Are you letting God's grace and forgiveness heal you?

For All: Do you believe that often God does his best work in the worst situations?

Works [10 min]

Let's pray:

1. Every RiverLifer will know the sanctity of marriage and God's intention for marriage.

Announcements

1. Evangelism Equipping (Introductory tea session)

Sat, 14 Jul | 1.30pm | Faith Chapel

Register at the Information Counter by Sun, 8 Jul. For enquiries, please contact Karen Koh at 65114139 or karenkoh@riverlife.org.sg. EE training will commence in Jul 2018.

2. SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES

1 JUL-9 AUG | NIGHTLY | 8-10PM | IN CHURCHES NATIONWIDE

RiverLife will be co-anchoring the prayer meetings for the week of 29 Jul to 4 Aug with Pentecost Methodist Church and Bethesda Pasir Ris Mission Church.

For full schedule of Solemn Assemblies, please visit www.riverlife.org.sg/sites/files/riverlife/40day2018.pdf

3. ONE THING GATHERING 2018

THU-SAT, 19-21 JUL | WORSHIP CENTRE

CONFERENCE FEES: \$70 (ADULTS) | \$30 (FULL-TIME STUDENTS)

ADMISSION IS FREE FOR NIGHT SESSIONS

To register or find out more, visit www.onething.sg

Church Vision Statement:

"A vibrant family where sons and daughters mature and reveal the Father's glory from generation to generation."