



Fall 2025 Marriage Study | Week 12

Divorce

Opening Icebreaker (5 minutes)

Prompt (choose one):

- “Share one way someone showed you unexpected grace this month.”
- “Where do you go (a place or practice) to breathe and reset when life feels heavy?”

Leader Notes:

- Keep this light and simple – remind participants they may always pass.
- Transition: *“We begin light, but tonight’s conversation is tender. We’ll lean on Scripture to understand God’s heart for marriage, and how we walk with one another when it breaks.”*

2) Scripture Reflection (12-15 minutes)

Read Malachi 2:13-16 aloud

“...the wife of your youth... your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant... ‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD...”

Discussion Questions (3-4 minutes):

1. What reasons does Malachi give for God’s grief over divorce?
2. How does this shape the way a church should talk about marriage and divorce?

Read Matthew 19:3-9 aloud

“What God has joined together, let no one separate... except for sexual immorality...”

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Discussion Questions (4-5 minutes):

3. In your own words, what is Jesus affirming about marriage here?
4. Why does sexual immorality strike at the very heart of the covenant?
5. How does "permitted, not required" help us hold grace and truth together?

Read 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 aloud

"...if the unbeliever departs, let them depart... the brother or sister is not bound..."

Discussion Questions (3-4 minutes):

6. What does "not bound" mean in this context?
7. Where does the church's wisdom and involvement matter most in complex cases (abuse, desertion)?

Leader Note:

Briefly explain: Many churches understand ongoing, unrepentant abuse as covenant-breaking/desertion. Safety comes first, with elders and appropriate authorities immediately involved.

Optional Comfort Readings (if time):

- *Hosea 3:1 – God's pursuing love.*
- *Jeremiah 3:6-8 – God knows the pain of betrayal.*

3) Truth + Compassion in Practice (6-7 minutes)**Leader Recap (30 seconds):**

- God hates divorce because it breaks covenant, distorts His faithfulness, and wounds generations.
- Scripture permits divorce in cases of sexual immorality (Matt. 19) and desertion by an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7).
- Permission ≠ requirement. Where there is safety and genuine repentance, reconciliation remains the first aim.

Pair Share (4 minutes):

- Craft one sentence that holds truth + tenderness (e.g., *"God's design is covenant faithfulness, and if yours is broken, we will walk with you toward safety, repentance, and hope."*).
- Share one unhelpful sentence people sometimes say – then rewrite it with grace and accuracy.

Group Debrief (2 minutes):

- Which phrases best combined faithfulness and kindness?

Leader Notes:

- Encourage brevity and gentleness; avoid quoting clichés that could re-open wounds.

4) Case Studies: Wisdom Rehearsal (7-8 minutes)

Format: Break into triads. Read one scenario; discuss the prompts. Rotate if time allows.

Case A: Adultery with apparent remorse

- What first steps honor God and protect the marriage?
- How do confession, accountability, and tested repentance fit in?
- When might temporary separation be wise, and who should guide it?

Case B: Ongoing pornography + deceit

- How do we distinguish relapse from entrenched, unrepentant sin?
- What does genuine repentance look like over time (fruit, transparency, counsel)?

Case C: Coercion or physical/sexual abuse

- What immediate steps ensure safety (law enforcement, medical care, elders)?
- How can the group support while pastors/elders lead legal/disciplinary processes?

Leader Reminder: Safety is priority. Elders must shepherd legal + spiritual care.

5) Guardrails for Our Community (4-5 minutes)

Do/Don't Quick List:

- **Do:** protect, pray, show up, speak Scripture, involve elders, offer meals/childcare, follow up after key dates.
- **Don't:** pry for details, promise outcomes, minimize pain, pressure for quick fixes, spread stories.

Read Galatians 6:1-2 aloud

"Restore... in a spirit of gentleness... bear one another's burdens."

Discussion (1-2 minutes):

8. What does gentle restoration look like in our small group?

6) Practicing Reconciliation & Repentance (5-6 minutes)

Read Ephesians 4:31-32 aloud

"Be kind to one another... forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Think → Pair → Share (4 minutes):

- If you've wronged your spouse, what should biblical confession include? (A – Action & Attitude; B – Biblical language; C – Cost; D – Do going forward.)
- If you've been wronged, what forgiveness does *not* mean (instant trust) vs. what it can mean (releasing vengeance, opening to a wise process)?

Group Close (1-2 minutes):

- Where do repentance, boundaries, and hope meet in a gospel-shaped community?

7) Closing Scripture & Prayer (3-4 minutes)

Read Psalm 34:18 aloud

"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."

Prayer Focus:

- For strained marriages: repentance, safety, wise counsel, genuine change.
- For the divorced/separated: Christ's nearness, healing, church family support.
- For the church: truthful teaching, compassionate presence, courage to protect the vulnerable.

Optional Homework (15-30 minutes this week)

- **Scripture + Journal:** Read Matt. 19:1-12; 1 Cor. 7:10-24. Write: What is clear? What is complex? Where do I need counsel?
- **A.C.T.S. Prayer with spouse/friend:** Adoration, Confession (specific), Thanksgiving, Supplication (specific).
- **Confession Practice (ABCD):** Write a 4-part confession for a real, non-explosive issue. Share it with your spouse/accountability partner.
- **Care Calendar:** Identify one couple/individual to support this month (meal, childcare, prayer note).
- **Safety & Wisdom:** Save elder/pastor contact info. Discuss as a group: *"If someone disclosed abuse, what would our immediate response be?"*

Appendix (Leader Reference)

Key Texts: Mal. 2:13-16; Gen. 2:24; Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9; 1 Cor. 7:10-16; Hos. 3:1-5; Jer. 3:6-8; Eph. 4:31-32; Gal. 6:1-2; Ps. 34:18.

Grounds (summary):

- Sexual immorality (permitted, not required; Matt. 19).
- Desertion by an unbeliever (not bound; 1 Cor. 7).

- Many churches recognize ongoing, unrepentant abuse as covenant-breaking/desertion → safety first, elders involved.

Two Rails:

- **Truth without cruelty.**
- **Compassion without compromise.**