

# Lesson 4: A Look at Marriage

<p><b>MATTHEW PROFILE</b></p> 	<p><b>Genre:</b> Gospel Narrative</p> <p><b>Author:</b> Matthew the Apostle</p> <p><b>Passage:</b> Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-9</p> <p><b>Where Is It:</b> The first book of the New Testament: <b>Matthew</b>, Mark, Luke, John</p> <p><b>Key Characters:</b> Jesus, disciples</p> <p><b>Main Plot:</b> Jesus sits down on a mountainside. As his disciples come to him, Jesus delivers his famous Sermon on the Mount.</p>
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 **THE WORD**  
**Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-9**

 **ENGAGE THE WORD**  
**Lesson Overview: Physical Dimension**

This is the fourth lesson in our series about the physical dimension of a missional life. In this lesson, students will look at Jesus’s teaching about marriage and divorce. We will explore the question, *What does a faithful marriage look like and why is it important?*

Being a Christian does not make a person exempt from the possibility of divorce, even though Jesus teaches against it. Some of your students may not have a healthy model of what a marriage centered in Christ should look like. This lesson is intended to help students understand God’s purpose for the marriage commitment. They will take a close look at Jesus’s teaching and consider their own futures. We will try to elevate solid examples of faithful marriages.

**Biblical Commentary**

Compared to our understanding of gender equality, the cultural concepts of marriage from the ancient Near East sound very discriminatory. Under both Jewish and Roman law, adultery referred primarily to the actions of the woman, not the man. If a man wanted to marry someone else, he had the option to divorce his wife by giving her a certificate of divorce. The woman, however, was without options.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pushes against this custom by insisting that breaking the marriage covenant and marrying another constitutes adultery for both men and women.

**MATTHEW 5:31-32**

As we consider this week’s passage, we must keep in mind Jesus’s teaching in verses 27-30, when he says that lustful thoughts—not simply

**Certificate of Divorce**

A document declaring the separation of a husband and wife mandated by Mosaic law... “She is not my wife, and I am not her husband.”

—Walter A. Elwell, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*



### THE MAIN IDEA

JESUS TEACHES THAT MARRIAGE IS INTENDED TO BE A PERMANENT UNION. STUDENTS WILL FOCUS ON MODELS OF FAITHFUL MARRIAGES IN A CULTURE OF HIGH DIVORCE RATES.

sexual acts—are adulterous. Jesus also expands the understanding of adultery to include divorcing one’s spouse to remarry someone else.

Jesus is referencing the law given through Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The main idea of this passage is that if a man divorces his wife because of “something indecent” in her, he must give her a certificate of divorce. Jesus, however, goes further to say that sexual immorality is a reasonable cause for divorce, but that God’s purpose for marriage is to be a binding, lifelong commitment.

#### MATTHEW 19:1-9

The Pharisees challenge Jesus head on to discover when a man can divorce his wife. Here Jesus further explains his teachings on the sacredness of marriage. Jesus bases his understanding of marriage in the creation story. The covenant of marriage is the uniting of a man and woman to become one. Humans are not to divide what God has united. When the Pharisees ask Jesus why Moses even gave the option for divorce, he responds by telling them that the Israelites couldn’t handle God’s true intent at the time because their hearts were hardened.

According to Jesus, in marriage God creates a new relationship that offenses ought not dissolve. Forgiveness and reconciliation are supposed to be patterns for marriage. For Jesus, marriage was, and is, to reflect the gospel itself—covenant, forgiveness, reconciliation, unconditional love, and growth in unity.

As you teach this week’s lesson to your students, help them understand that God highly values marriage and the marriage covenant. A great marriage that is built on loyalty, faithfulness, communication, and selflessness has the opportunity to be a blessing to both people, give glory to God, and help build God’s kingdom in and throughout the world.



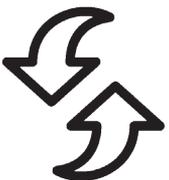
### Bible Background

“We receive an ever-expanding picture of what marriage is, including as its basic components divine institution, companionship, romantic relationship, covenant, sexual union, joint livelihood, parenting and a shared religious life. In addition, marriage is a leading biblical metaphor for the relationship between God and the believer.”

—Leland Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*

“It simply felt like I was losing my being, as if in the midst of my sleep I could simply disappear, fade away into nothing. It was the fear that now that the union that created me was dissolving, I might dissolve with it.”

—Andrew Root,  
*The Children of Divorce*



#### REFLECT ON THIS THEME:

What models of marriage, both good and bad, have you witnessed?

#### REFLECT ON YOUR STUDENTS:

Think about the families your students are growing up in. How many have gone through their parents divorcing?

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

**LESSON  
OUTLINE**



**Main Idea:** Jesus teaches that marriage is intended to be a permanent union. Students will focus on models of faithful marriages in a culture of high divorce rates.

**Resources:** Bibles, copies of handout, writing utensils, poster board or whiteboard/markers

**Connect to My Experience:**  
 Welcome and Weekly Highlights  
 Prayer  
 The Vow

**Connect to the Word:**  
 Discuss Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-9  
 Couple Role Models

**Connect to My Life and the World:**  
 Marriage Qualities Activity  
 Health Marriage Recipe

**Closing:** Affirmation and Prayer



## CONNECT TO MY EXPERIENCE

**Student Goal: Youth will start thinking about the difficulties of holding to marriage commitments amid trials.**

Welcome your students and ask them to share any highlights from their week. Be prepared to share some of your own highlights. This opening time helps the students know that you care about what happens in their lives. It also makes students more comfortable to speak up in the group.

**Pray for the group, using the following prayer if you choose:**

*Lord, there is so much we don't understand about you and about our own lives. Please reveal yourself through your Scripture and the ideas we share in discussion so that we may better know and love you. Amen.*

### STRONG MARRIAGE

Invite your group to consider examples, both good and bad, of marriages they have seen. Then, invite them to think about only strong marriages they have encountered. You may want to share examples from your life of strong marriages you have seen throughout your life. Although this may be very personal for your student, be sure that you and your students avoid using people's names, keeping the conversation to general characteristics.

**ASK:** What do you think are characteristics of a strong marriage?

What do you think are characteristics of a weak marriage?

Do you think most couples are able to stay married through difficult experiences? Why or why not?

**SAY:** Marriage is common in our world. As we know, some marriages last, while others do not.

Today we're going to talk about what Jesus has to say about marriage. Even though marriage will be years down the road, the preparations you make now and the values you develop will make a huge difference in the future, whether or not you choose to marry.

### CREATIVE OPTION: WEDDING PHOTOS

If you're married, show a video clip or photos from your own wedding. If you're not married, find some funny, old-school wedding clips.



## CONNECT TO THE WORD

**Student Goal: Youth will learn about Jesus's teaching on marriage through discussion and will consider role models of marriage.**

**READ:** Have a student read Matthew 5:31-32. You may want to have another student read Eugene Peterson's *The Message* to hear the verses in a different way.

**SAY:** Jesus is starting with one of the commandments of the Old Testament and taking it to another level. Jewish men were able to divorce their wives if they presented the right legal documentation. But Jesus makes it clear that to remarry after a divorce would be to commit the sin of adultery.

**ASK:** Why do you think Jesus seems to be so against divorce?

**READ:** Have another volunteer read Matthew 19:1-9.

**SAY:** Marriage is a gift from God that unites two people together in a binding commitment. God can use the marriage of two people who are faithfully committed to one another to be a blessing to others and to the world. Marriage is a great gift and the foundation of a family.

The reality is that this is not always the scenario we see. Divorce takes place whether we want it to or not. We can often experience deep scars and trauma when our parents or others we look up to divorce. Sometimes even marriages that don't end in divorce are not built on faithful, committed love to one another.

**ASK:** Who are some real-life couples whose marriages you admire?

What are some qualities you see in their marriages that you would like to have in yours?

Why is marriage important?

**SAY:** One of the best ways to prepare for your own future relationships is to find and observe good relationship role models.

### Further Explanation

It's important for your students to recognize that while marriage can draw us closer to God, we are not deficient while we are single. Jesus, Paul, and many others throughout Scripture chose to serve God in their singleness. Instead of waiting around for someone to marry, we should seek where God wants to use us even now! It also might be helpful to explain that it takes two whole and healthy people to create one healthy and God-honoring marriage.



### Facilitator Note:

If you know of any specific students who have experienced the pain of divorce, perhaps lead the discussion into a healing conversation in which students can share their own hurts caused by divorce. However, be sensitive!

### CREATIVE OPTION: WRITE A NOTE

Ask your students to write a note to a couple they look up to. Challenge them to deliver the note or message to the couple as a source of affirmation.



## CONNECT TO MY LIFE AND THE WORLD

**Student Goal: Youth will consider what qualities they want and don't want in a future spouse to help prepare them for the future.**

**SAY:** Marriage may seem like a distant reality for you, but there are things you can do now to prepare you for a faithful marriage.

### MARRIAGE QUALITIES ACTIVITY

\*Use the student handout for this activity.

Distribute a copy of the student handout to each student. On one side of the paper, have students write down the qualities they would like to have in a future spouse. On the other side of the paper, have them write down the qualities they don't want in a future spouse. Give the students about five minutes to complete the activity.

Have students look at the list of qualities they hope their future spouse has. Instruct them to circle a few qualities that they could work on in their own lives.

For example: If I want my future husband/wife to be patient and forgiving but I am not patient or forgiving, I need to work on having that attribute myself.

Have students take another look at the qualities they do not want in their future spouses. Again, challenge students to circle one or two attributes they don't want their future spouses to have that may be a part of their own lives.

For example: If I don't want my future spouse to constantly make fun of people but I am making fun of others, I need to work on this area of my life.

**SAY:** While you will likely not get married for a number of years, it is a good thing to recognize the characteristics and traits you value in others and would also value in a future spouse. We can also pray and ask God to help us have some of the same qualities we hope to have in a spouse while asking God to help rid us of the negative qualities in our lives that we wouldn't want a spouse to have.

## HEALTHY MARRIAGE RECIPE

There are five essential characteristics to a healthy marriage: commitment, trust, love, communication, and selflessness.

Write each of those characteristics on a whiteboard or poster board. Taking each of these in turn, have your students give definitions and examples of these characteristics. Talk about why all of these are important ingredients for a healthy marriage.

**ASK:** While marriage may be far off, some of you are dating people or will in the future. As followers of Jesus, how should we view dating?

**SAY:** Jesus didn't talk about dating because it was not a custom in his culture, but the incredible thing about following Jesus is that anyone from any culture can follow him. Following Jesus looks a little different all around the world, based on our unique cultures, but there are certainly ways to date that are faithful to the way of Jesus. Keep thinking about what that might look like.



## CLOSING

Reaffirm the following truths to your students:

1. Even though we are young, we can learn about and prepare to have godly marriages someday.
2. God never plans on having a couple divorce once they marry.
3. A great marriage is built on commitment, love, communication, selflessness, and trust.

Close your lesson in prayer. Pray for your students' future relationships and for their growth in the way of Christ.



### Facilitator Note:

It may be difficult to get your students to take this seriously. Marriage may seem so distant and irrelevant to them. If you can show a few of them the importance of considering their marriages now, it could save them from a lot of pain. Many teenagers will assume that their actions now will not affect their lives as adults. This is simply not true. The way they view and pursue relationships now is often the trajectory for how they will view important relationships in the future, like marriage.