



*The #1 catalyst for spiritual growth is reading and reflecting on the Bible.
Use these questions for personal study or as part of a community group experience.*

WEEK 4

05/14/2017

Note to Leaders: This Mother's Day message steps back from the "Just Dance" sermon series, and thus creates a bit of disconnect with your regular sermon topics. To continue this theme without the series will require a little more consideration and preparation. Reading the scriptures and questions beforehand will be very helpful.

Caution: This discussion addresses a life-long commitment represented in a marriage covenant. There are many in our church and groups that have suffered the pain of divorce. If your group has a number of people who have gone through divorce, please be mindful, tactful, and intentional about the questions you choose to discuss. **See [Divorce and Background Comments](#) below.

Sermon Questions

1. Did anything from Sunday's message resonate with you?
2. If you could ask the speaker a follow-up question, what would that be?
3. Were there any scriptures that stood out to you most? Why?

Transition

Covenant and promise are the foundation of marriage. Genesis 2:20-25, referenced again by Paul in Ephesians 5:31, states "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This uniting is done through covenant, a binding promise, or oath. This marriage relationship is unique and the deepest form of covenant. This is portrayed when the couple offers their vows in the presence of God and directed as a promise to God.

Discussion Questions

Group members may respond to these questions in light of their current context as either single, married, widowed, divorce, etc. In other words, what have they seen, experienced, or perceived as it pertains to marriage?

1. When you think of traditional marriage vows what things come to mind?
2. God views marriage as a covenant, not a contract (see Genesis 2:20-25; Malachi 2:14; Proverbs 2:16-17). Consider these three differences:

- a. A covenant is based on trust between parties while a contract is based on distrust.
- b. A covenant is based on unlimited responsibility while a contract is based on limited liability.
- c. A covenant cannot be broken if new circumstances occur while a contract can be voided by mutual consent.

How do these three differences affect your view of marriage?

3. In practical terms, what can be done to ensure that marriage—whether potential or current—is built on a covenant and not just a contract?
4. The Bible regularly uses the marriage relationship as an analogy for God's loyalty and promise to Israel, who often times responds unfaithfully (consider the Book of Hosea!). As you think about the history of God and Israel, you see times of joy, frustration, brokenness, silence, and conflict. How does this mirror the journey of a husband and wife?
5. Why is it important to acknowledge that every marriage has these different seasons of incredible intimacy and painful distance, of romantic bliss and relational tension?
6. How can couples overcome challenging times?
7. Not every marriage passes the test of time. With increasingly long life-spans, some marriages have the potential to last 4 or 5 decades. What are some concerns that might settle in when a couple realizes they could spend half a century together? How can these be overcome?
8. John Gottman and Timothy Keller share a statistic about happiness in marriage that is shocking and challenging. "Longitudinal studies demonstrate that two-thirds of those unhappy marriages out there will become happy within five years if people stay married." How does this affect our view of covenant commitment despite seasonal challenges?

What things could be done during periods of unhappiness to better ensure personal and relational growth?

Divorce and Background Comments

For those couples that face the harsh reality and pain of divorce. First, Grace does not view you as less-than. Instead, we extend our prayers and hearts, having seen the pain that divorce—its causes and results—have on each individual involved. We are sorry. Surprisingly, in Jeremiah 3:8, even God claims to have gone through a divorce. In this passage, God expresses his grief and pain over Israel's decision to pursue other gods, giving themselves to a new covenant partner, a new lover.

Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 wherein he promises to bind up the broken-hearted and to comfort all who mourn. This occurs as individuals turn to God, focusing first on their covenant relationship with him. In the challenge to place God at the center of our lives and identity, all people are equal—singles, couples, widowed, separated, or divorced.

The analogy of God's marriage to Israel, as well as the physical marriage between husband and wife, parallel wonderfully the image of our spiritual journey. This includes seasons of joy, frustration, anger, brokenness, silence, or conflict.

9. As you consider the paragraphs above, where do you see the principle of covenant impacting your spiritual journey?

10. What things need to change to more consistently place God at the center of your life?

11. Have you experienced these different seasons in your walk with God? If you have overcome some of these challenging, or unhappy times in your walk with God, what things helped you through?

Prayer Requests

Take a few minutes to go around the room and ask for prayers. Write these down as they are being shared. Additionally, challenge people to begin praying about the step of boldness God may be calling them to during this series. Finally, pray together. You can pray the prayer below or your own prayer that incorporates the requests represented in the group.

Closing Prayer

Father, life is from far perfect and at times our best intentions fail. Reveal to me your love, care, and compassion that is demonstrated in your covenant of faithfulness. Help be to first respond and remain faith to you, that my relationship with you might strengthen and direct my relationship with others. In Jesus name I pray, amen.