

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Ministry: A Study of Matthew 14–20

STUDY SIXTEEN

E-Harmony vs. Disharmony

Matthew 19:1–12

The reality of an unhappy marriage goes all the way back to the beginning of life. Adam and Eve had known nothing but beauty and harmony and closeness and intimacy. They lived in innocence until sin landed hard and changed everything. And from that moment, all the way to this very day, the presence of sin has done its best to ruin every marriage if it could.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

GETTING married and living happily ever after aren't necessarily synonymous. For many, getting married was the best choice they could've ever made. Their spouse is their best friend, their closest confidante, their life partner. Their marriage goes through valleys, yes. But they climb out hand-in-hand and stand on the mountaintop even stronger than before.

Sadly, for many others, marriage isn't so happy. They're trapped in a deep, dark valley that resonates with fighting, lying, infidelity, or abuse. They look at their spouse and wonder how the beloved person they married transformed into the ugly monster living with them. They're wondering if they're able to—or even want to—hang on.

No matter the marriage, times will come when the valley seems like it'll never end. So what can a couple do to hold fast? When—if ever—is it best to let go? In this *Searching the Scriptures* study on Matthew 19:1–12, we will tackle this hard question and see what Jesus has to say about the hot topics of marriage and divorce.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

E-Harmony vs. Disharmony

Matthew 19:1–12



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Offer this prayer to your God, the only immovable Rock, before you dig in to His word today:

Father, You and You alone are the foundation of my life, my immovable Rock, in whom I will never be shaken. Thank You for strengthening me to be like You in love and courage, mercy and grace. Be with me as I study Your Word today. In Jesus' strong name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Before discussing the difficult topic of divorce, it's helpful to look at the broader biblical story to discern God's beautiful blueprint for marriage.

Genesis 1 is an overture of creation. As God created the earth and filled it with life, the crescendo rises to one climactic moment: the creation of humankind.

*So God created human beings in his own image.
In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)*

Genesis 2:15–25 takes the melody of this moment and adds a harmony. God placed the man in Eden to work the garden, but he needed a companion. When God decided that no animal could match His prized image-bearer, He created the woman to work alongside the man. How does *Genesis 2:24* help us understand God's design for a man and woman in marriage?



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Thousands of years later, the apostle Paul would riff on these very words to a newly formed community of Christians to show them how their faith in Jesus should affect their marriages. Read [Ephesians 5:21–33](#) and summarize Paul's key ideas about marriage. According to [5:31–32](#), what did God ultimately intend marriage to represent?

A strong Christian marriage heralds God's glory over His creation and Christ's love for His church. *What a lovely sound!* But wrong notes often punctuate the music, causing a husband and wife to fall out of rhythm. So then what?



Observation: A Test on Divorce

In *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll lays out the approach he follows when he studies the Bible. The first step is observation. Read [Matthew 19:1–12](#) and pay careful attention only to what the text explicitly says.¹

According to [verse 3](#), what was the Pharisees' motive for asking Jesus about divorce? Then, summarize Jesus' response to this interrogation in [Matthew 19:4–6](#).

To begin with, there is the joining, the bonding, the cementing of a relationship. God sees them as one flesh, and you can't divide "one." They are drawn together by God in that permanent bond and one-flesh existence. The announcement commanded whom God joins together, let no one split apart or separate. Period. End of answer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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In *Matthew 19:7*, the Pharisees weren't lying about Moses allowing divorce in some circumstances. They rightly based this claim on *Deuteronomy 24:1–4*. According to Jesus in *Matthew 19:8*, why did God include this concession in the law?

According to Jesus in *verse 9*, what reason legitimizes divorce?

This back-and-forth between Jesus and the Pharisees feels fast-paced and hard to follow. No wonder the disciples were so confused in *verse 10*! Now that we've made some observations, we need to dig deeper to understand the meaning of these profound words from Jesus.



Interpretation: The Meaning of Marriage

In Jesus' day, two prominent schools of Jewish thought strongly opposed each other on divorce. The school of Shammai nearly always disapproved of divorce, while the school of Hillel freely permitted it. To trap Jesus, the Pharisees carefully crafted a question based on this cultural backdrop. But Jesus didn't plainly answer yes or no to keep from aligning with either tradition.



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So, how did Jesus' reply demonstrate the superiority of God's blueprint for marriage over human tradition in *Matthew 19:1–9*? Using your *Bible study tools*, explain Jesus' key ideas about marriage and divorce in His reply.²

Reread the brief discussion between Jesus and His disciples in *19:10–12*. To what did Jesus refer with the “eunuch” imagery? What does this metaphor teach about the different marital paths Christians can take today? See pages 105–106 of Pastor Chuck's commentary *Insights on Matthew 16–18* for some guidance.

Look again at the last line. There's a lot of grace in that line. Jesus isn't poking His index finger into your sternum saying, "Accept this and believe it and go with it!" He says, "Let anyone accept this who can." Keep that in mind. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Paul's Understanding of Divorce

Did you know that *Matthew 19:1–12* isn't the only passage that discusses divorce? The apostle Paul addressed this difficult topic in his letter to the church at Corinth. Read *1 Corinthians 7:8–16*, and summarize what Paul said about divorce and how it complements what Jesus taught?



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Now that we've looked at God's blueprint for marriage and His thoughts on divorce, let's look at practical ways for how Christians should handle this touchy topic.

Application: A Divine Ideal and a Miserable Reality

Over Pastor Chuck's decades of ministry, he's wrestled with these passages while ministering to those with struggling marriages. Here are four of his wise applications:

1. *Ideally, marriage should be an indissoluble union between one man and one woman.* Marriage is based on mutual commitment, love, and faithfulness that results in harmony and fulfillment and ends only by death.
2. *Yet, life is not—and never can be—tidy, orderly, or perfect.* Because of everyone's sinfulness, the unexpected and unpredictable can enter into every marriage.
3. *We who aren't a part of a marital breakdown can't fully or correctly evaluate the depth of their misery.* We do not know enough to judge them.
4. *To expect two people who find themselves in such incurable misery to remain forever bound in a lifetime of unhealthy disharmony and in quite possibly dangerous consequences surely is not what God requires of them.*

Take a few moments to consider your own marital status—single, married, separated, divorced, widowed. How does this study speak into your current circumstances? What do you believe God wants you to know or trust, do or avoid—not only in your own life but also perhaps in another's?

God's plan for marriage is truly remarkable, but sin has corrupted the good things God prepared for His creation. A strong marriage is a gift, something to be celebrated, cultivated, and honored. Yet, those without a joyful marriage still have access to what God designed earthly marriage to point to: *the church—the very bride of Christ Himself, and He is our greatest gift of all!*



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A FINAL PRAYER

Conclude your study by offering God a thoughtful prayer based on what He taught in this passage of Scripture.

ENDNOTES

1. For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck, consult our online instructional Web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.” This page provides you an introduction to four important skills in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Pastor Chuck’s book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.
2. Other tools we recommend are a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Pastor Chuck’s favorite Bible dictionary is the *New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*. A variety of versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at netbible.org.

