

Women Caring for Women: Divorce CBC Sunday School November 9, 2025

Discussion question: Does anyone have a favorite memory from their wedding? Maybe something that went comically wrong, or a sweet moment with a family member?

A few notes:

-As a church we want to be "obsessed" with valuing, protecting and preserving marriages. Marriage is a good gift from God. Divorce is an awful, painful tragedy that hardly ever improves a person's life. However, for the purpose of this class, we are assuming that everything has been done, unsuccessfully, to encourage the divorcing couple to reconcile (where appropriate.) It is clear that reconciliation is not an option and divorce is the next step. **You do not have to condone the divorce to minister to the wounded.**

-There are two main views on divorce among Christians

- 1) Permanence view: Scripture never condones divorce and a believer must never initiate a divorce. If a divorce is forced upon them they are not free to remarry or they would be committing adultery.
- 2) Mainstream evangelical view: Divorce always reflects how things shouldn't be, but it is allowed for in the Bible as a mercy to victims of adultery, neglect and abuse. The Bible "teaches that while divorce always violates God's ideal, he provides protection and an exception for a spouse whose partner has heinously violated the marriage covenant." Jim Newheiser

1. What is lost?

- a. Before the divorce: The marriage ideal is lost
 - i. Marriage is meant to be a place of safety & belonging, joyful intimacy, companionship & sexual expression, exclusive love & devotion, and a lifetime guarantee that someone will be there to drive you to chemotherapy, or sit by your hospital bedside.
 1. "A few things last forever, or even for a lifetime, and this is what makes marriage such a special event in one's life. Someone has proposed to you, saying, "I love you and only you"...Is there anything more affirming than for someone you love to make this lifelong commitment to you? That is why it is so devastating when those vows are broken." David Instone-Brewer
 - ii. Marriage is a covenant in which both parties make vows to each other: generally these include a promise of provision, exclusive conjugal love and lifetime commitment
 1. *Who remembers their vows? They probably went something like this:* "I, [name], take you, [name], to be my wedded husband. To have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part. In the presence of God and these witnesses, I make this vow".
 2. All spouses will fail to perfectly keep their vows. Forgiveness is a big part of marriage.
 - iii. Divorce does not necessarily break a marriage – The marriage covenant is broken when one or both spouses commits adultery or breaks their vows repeatedly and without repentance
 1. "We have to distinguish between a marriage break up, which is always wrong, and divorce, which is the legal recognition that a marriage has broken up. Moses' law did not say that it was acceptable to break up a

marriage; it merely prescribed the legal process that was necessary after a break up had happened.” David Instone-Brewer

2. An unfaithful spouse breaks their vows by committing adultery.
 3. A neglectful spouse breaks their vows by failing to provide basic material needs for their spouse either by laziness or cruelty. A spouse may also neglect a wife or husband’s emotional or sexual needs by indifference or cruelty. A neglectful spouse may desert or separate from his or her spouse.
 4. An abusive spouse breaks their vows with a pattern of hurtful behaviors intended to control, manipulate and belittle. Examples: forcing or withholding sex, inflicting physical or verbal pain, refusing to allow contact with friends or family, etc
 5. **Divorce is not the only possible result for broken marriages.** Many marriages can be healed of broken vows if both spouses are willing to do the hard – but rewarding – work of reconciliation and change. A healed marriage is a glorious picture of the gospel in action – the church is blessed by those who have done hard work to heal their marriages. However, this only works if both spouses are repentant (when in sin) and are motivated to change.
 6. **In rare cases, divorce may be the only way to protect a woman who is being abused and mistreated** (and is possibly afraid for her life or her children’s lives.) It is not appropriate, wise or loving to advise this woman to “just go home and submit.” Many women have been hurt deeply by this bad advice and lack of care from the church.
 - a. *Note:* You can expect wise, compassionate counsel from Pastor Aaron or Pastor Russ!
- b. In the divorce: Loss of stability, home, possessions, parenting norms, finances, emotional health
- i. “A woman who is in the aftermath of divorce, whether it was initiated by her or her husband, will likely feel she is in the deepest, darkest valley she will ever experience. Hope is shattered. Trust is an illusion. Every possible emotion that can be felt pierces her soul. Every step of grieving overwhelms the survivor. Thoughts of suicide are common.” Welby O’Brian
 - ii. She may have to move, she may lose possessions, pets
 - iii. She may have less/limited time with her children, worrying about them, not in control of their upbringing, angry ex-husband may be trying to turn them against her
 - iv. She may have been out of the workforce for years raising kids and now must scramble to provide for herself.
 - v. She will be grieving –“Divorce is like a death but without a funeral to celebrate a life well lived, or mourn an unexpected loss.” -Greg Smalley
 - vi. She will be under immense stress: “Experts say that divorce is usually the second most stressful life event for a person.” - Greg Smalley
 1. The “divorce diet” refers to weight gain or loss due to immense stress and anxiety
- c. After the divorce: Loss of identity, purpose, community, future
- i. Identity: “Who am I apart from my spouse?”
 - ii. Purpose: One divorcee said: “I used to go to the grocery store to buy my wife and kids’ favorite foods – now grocery shopping feels meaningless.”
 - iii. Shared history & memories

1. "Imagine someone handed you a large jar filled with sand of various colors and told you to separate the colors. That is what the uncoupling process feels like." Greg Smalley
 2. She now holds years of memories and she can't say "Hey remember when?" to anyone about them.
- iv. Affection/Intimacy
 - v. Community
 1. She feels alone. She may feel like a fifth wheel with friends.
 2. She may lose contact with extended family on her husband's side
 3. She may have nowhere to go on holidays
 4. Couple friends may be lost, some friends may be split over who they side with or just pull away from the awkwardness
 - vi. Hopes and dreams

Discussion question: If you're married, what would you miss most about your husband if you were no longer married?

2. Where is God in the pain?

- a. God himself is a divorcee (Is 54:5, Jer 31:32)
 - i. "I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries." Jer 3:8
 - ii. "The Old Testament prophets described God's relationship with Israel as if it was a marriage: when Israel worshiped other gods, she was likened to an unfaithful wife; she broke all her marriage vows while God continued to clothe, feed and love her faithfully. We saw that the prophets did not regard divorce itself as an evil act, but considered the breaking of marriage vows as the sin that breaks up the marriage...God's divorce also gave us an insight into the way he feels about divorce: he hates it because it means that promises in the marriage contract have been broken. (Mal 2:14-16)" David Instone-Brewer
 - iii. God knows all of those feelings of being rejected, snubbed, passed over, mistreated, lied to and of love unrequited.
 - iv. "God is not a ruler who sits on a high throne in isolation, ignorant of the suffering of his people. He aches with us, even in divorce, which he too has suffered. God loves you and knows your secret sufferings." David Instone-Brewer
- b. God offers hope to the rejected
 - i. At the height of Israel's deserved rejection from God for her sin in Jeremiah chapter 3, God also beckons her to come back. "Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion." (Jer 3:14)
 - ii. His love for his people is illustrated by the lengths he went to to win her back to himself. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Rom 5:8
 - iii. Those who believe in the gospel have been betrothed to Jesus (Eph 5:25-27, 2 Cor 11:2) and a glorious wedding is in our future "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God." Rev 19:7-9

Discussion question: In what way do you think the wedding feast in heaven will be more joyful because of the pain of the “divorce” in Jeremiah 3?

3. What does healing look like?

- a. Grieve the “deaths”
 - i. Divorce is the death of a marriage and all that goes along with it. Taking time to bravely confront all that is lost is key in starting the healing process.
 - ii. Death is not a waste in God’s economy
 1. “The flower must die in order to produce the fruit. The fruit dies to allow the seed to fall once again into the ground. The seed dies, and there’s a new beginning. Nothing is ever wasted. Dead leaves, dead flesh, natural waste of all kinds, enrich the soil. In God’s economy, whether he is making a flower or a human soul, nothing ever comes to nothing. The losses are his way of accomplishing the gains.” Elisabeth Elliot, *Loneliness*
- b. Accept your “new” identity - you are worthy and wanted by the God of the universe
 - i. God lovingly crafted you and his care bestows value on you. Nobody can change that value.
 - ii. You may have been cruelly rejected or betrayed. You may have rejected or betrayed your spouse. Either way, your value to God remains unchanged and he can heal and forgive all of that hurt. *You are worthy to be loved because God loves you.*
- c. Lean into Christ, the perfect husband
 - i. You were always meant to find your everything in God –not your spouse
 1. He is always faithful, he never breaks a promise or finds someone else to lessen His love for you. His love for you is deep and unchanging. His attention is undivided, his affection never wavers. He is so desirable and when you want him, he gives himself fully and satisfies you completely.
 2. Sometimes a failed relationship can highlight for us the beauty of God
 - ii. Jesus gave up his life for his bride - that’s the opposite of rejection
- d. Use your loneliness
 - i. For sanctification – “In the wilderness of loneliness we are terribly vulnerable. What we want is OUT, and sometimes there appears to be some easy ways to get there...but we may be missing the fact that is it *here*, where we happen to be at this moment and not in another place or another time, that we may learn to love him—here where it seems he is not at work, where his will seems obscure or frightening, where he is not doing what we expected him to do, where he is the most absent. Here and nowhere else is the appointed place. If faith does not go to work *here*, it will not go to work at all.” Elisabeth Elliot, *Loneliness*
 - ii. For service – The Apostle Paul lauds the value of a single woman (divorcee or otherwise) in the church. (1 Cor 7:7, 32-34) Paul calls singleness “a gift” and adds that a single woman can potentially be more single-mindedly devoted to God than a married woman can be. It is a gift in that, when stewarded wisely, it benefits the church and her own sanctification.
- e. Pursue health
 - i. Exercising improves mental health, releases sexual energy
 - ii. Learning new skills, making new friends, having new experiences keeps you from being lonely, and helps you make new friends and find your identity as a single person.

Discussion question: Can you think of a time of loneliness or “death” that God used to bring growth or newness in your life?

4. What can comforters do?

- a. Reach out – “Silence fills with suspicion”
 - i. Don’t ignore her because you don’t know what to say. She will be hyper sensitive to rejection at this stage, and your silence or distance will either feel like judgement and rejection. “I’m so sorry, is there anything I can do?” is better than not saying anything!
 - ii. Acknowledge her pain. Divorce is ALWAYS painful. “I know this has to be so painful, and I am praying for you.”
 1. She may feel like people are silently imagining the reasons for her divorce - which is a painful head space. When you extend compassion and support, it lets her know you’re not fishing for juicy details or withholding care until you know the whole story.
 - iii. Vague questions can be exhausting for an emotionally depleted person and feel disingenuous. Instead of “how are you?” ask her “What’s been the best and most difficult part of your week?” or “What’s one thing I could pray about for you today?”
 - iv. Don’t try to “fix” her: *listen* and be willing to just sit in silence with her while she cries.
 - v. Don’t forget the kids
 1. One friend shared that parenting was the hardest part of her divorce. Her kids cried when they couldn’t be with their dad, she worried about them when they were, and it’s hard to care for them when you’re in the depths of grieving.
 2. Acknowledge the divorce - they may need to know there are caring people who are not embarrassed to talk about it. “I know your parents are getting divorced, and I’m sorry. It must be so hard. I’m here if you ever need to talk about it.”
- b. Carry her burdens with her - physical needs
 - i. Does she need help finding a new place to live?
 1. Could you go along with her to view potential rentals/houses or help her pack? Packing can trigger a lot of emotions, and it may be helpful to have a supportive friend nearby
 - ii. If she’s having car trouble, can she afford repairs?
 - iii. She may be struggling with simple “handyman” jobs and be too embarrassed to ask for help fixing the dryer or the leaking faucet. Ask her regularly if there’s something around the house that needs to be fixed.
 - iv. If she has kids, do they need rides?
 - v. Give her a hug, an encouraging word, a compliment, remember her birthday
- c. Spiritual needs
 - i. “Those who are divorced often feel like failures, and are hurting, angry, lonely people. Whether or not we agree with all their decisions, they need a big dose of unconditional love and hope rather than condemnation.” Judy Corey
 - ii. “Most people don’t need advice during a divorce, they just need to know that they’re not alone and that people care.” Korin Miller.
 - iii. Remind her of what’s true. Her emotions will provide her with a feast of lies. Arm yourself with Scripture about God’s sovereignty, goodness, care, trustworthiness.

Assure her that she can be sure of God's character even when she can't be sure of anything else.

1. "My joy is becoming less dependent upon my own immediate circumstances and more attached to what He is doing." Elisabeth Elliot, *Loneliness*
- iv. If your friend was the "sinful party" in the divorce (had an affair, the addiction, was the abuser) and persists in the sin, remember that support is not equal to enablement. You may need to set boundaries and remind her that you love her but you wouldn't love her if you didn't remind her that her sin is causing her pain.
- d. Pray for her
 - i. Pray for protection from the trauma of divorce for her and her children
 - ii. Pray for sexual purity. The emptiness feels intense and she may desperately want to be touched, loved, etc... She will be very vulnerable, especially in the beginning.
- e. Manage your own emotions wisely
 - i. You may feel hurt & confused (Why didn't they tell us they were having problems?), anxious (How will this affect our social circle, or our kids?) or angry (How can they do this to each other?).
 - ii. Be in prayer for your own heart
 - iii. Find a trusted person to check in on you emotionally
 - iv. Guard your tongue. Don't bash her ex-husband in front of others or her.
 - v. Don't play detective. Don't stalk her ex on social media trying to discover the reasons for the divorce or find out if he's dating anyone, etc. This is not good for your own heart and it's not helpful to your friend.
- f. Take care of your own marriage
 - i. Pray for your marriage. The divorce of a friend is a humbling reminder that we all need God's help to have a marriage that glorifies him.
 - ii. If your marriage is healthy:
 1. Take some time to check in with your spouse. Have an honest conversation about the health of your marriage. Are you keeping your vows?
 2. It's easy to think of what your spouse could do to make *you* happier in your marriage. Ask your husband, "What can *I* do that would make our marriage healthier and happier for *you*?" Approach the conversation humbly, having seen firsthand the pain caused by broken marriage vows.
 3. A broken marriage often starts with one or both spouses being unwilling to acknowledge their own sin or make an effort to change. A little humility and hard work TODAY can prevent a world of hurt in the future.
 - iii. If your marriage is struggling:
 1. Please, ask for help. Is your sex life terrible, are you arguing constantly/just not talking because you can't seem to communicate, or are you living on separate sides of the house? The problems will probably not go away on their own. "Take the car to the mechanic before it breaks down on the freeway." Meet with your pastor, a counselor, or some wise friends.
 2. Marriage is so valuable, it deserves our fiercest fight.
 3. "Most marriages can be healed with effort from both partners, but like cancer, if it is left untreated, too long, broken vows are terminal because they kill a marriage." David Instone-Brewer
 - iv. If your marriage is broken:
 1. You're in a hard, painful situation and need wise counsel, so reach out to your pastor. You won't shock the pastor or be turned away. You will get

guidance on the path of wisdom. It may be hard for you to see what to do next.

2. A trusted local therapist:
 - a. Ryan Ozias, Marriage and Family Therapist, Christ First Counseling, Shawnee, KS

Recommended Resources:

Divorce and Remarriage in the Church by David Instone-Brewer

Article: *What Does the Bible Teach About Divorce and Remarriage?* Jim Newheiser

www.thegospelcoalition.org

Podcast: <https://www.authenticintimacy.com/409-divorce-remarriage-abuse-infidelity-porn-all-the-hard-things/>

Prayers of an Excellent Wife: Intercession for Him by Andrew Case

Women Caring for Women CBC Sunday School Syllabus

Part 1

Oct 5:	Introduction to loss, grief, suffering and healing
Oct 12:	Infertility & Miscarriage
Oct 19:	Depression
Oct 26:	Chronic Illness & Terminal Illness
Nov 2:	Post Abortion Syndrome
Nov 9:	Divorce

Part 2

Jan 18:	Domestic Abuse
Jan 25:	Sexual abuse
Feb 1:	Eating disorders
Feb 8:	Addiction
Feb 15:	Pornography / Infidelity
Feb 22:	Same Sex Attraction

Questions or feedback? Contact us!

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