

Sermon on the Mount part 6

Divorce (Matthew 5:31-32)

1. Fort Object Lesson:

(This object lesson idea and questions copied/adapted from *Group's Best Discussion Launchers for Youth Ministry*, p 69, Group Publishing.)

Divide youth into teams of 3-5 and have each team build a fort using the chairs from the class. Give them maybe 5 minutes.

Then ask: How is a fort like a strong, secure family?

Now, have youth remove a strategically placed chair (or two or three) from each fort that will make the fort collapse.

Then ask: How is that like what happens in a family when parents divorce?

Say: Let's see what the Bible says about divorce...

2. Jesus' Teaching:

Read Matthew 5:31-32 (while youth follow along in Bibles)

Say something like this...

- It's not "just give a certificate and everything's fine," like lots of people think today. Jesus says it is a big deal!
- Verse 32 may be hard to interpret:
 - A commentary by a guy named Lenski showed that the words for the wife who had been divorced and her new husband "committing adultery" may not be something the wife does or new husband does but something *done to* them by the first husband.¹
 - So maybe it means the first husband causes them to be adulterers
 - Or, that he causes them to be seen as adulterers
 - Or, could it even mean that they have been victims of adultery?
 - Any case, Jesus is saying it's a big deal!

Ask: What is the only exception Jesus gave here for not divorcing?
(The only exception Jesus gave for not divorcing was "marital unfaithfulness")

Explain:

- "Unfaithfulness" may mean more than just sexual sin (but either way, it would be something major).
- And, divorce is just permitted in that case – not mandatory.
 - People can try to forgive and work things out.
 - The story of Hosea in the OT gives an example of remaining faithful to his wife even though she was unfaithful. This was also an example of God remaining faithful to His people even though they weren't faithful to Him.

3. So what's the big deal about divorce?:

Ask: Why is divorce such a big deal?

¹ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, part of a commentary series (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1964 printing), pp 232-235.

Share any of these ideas that youth don't come up with:

- It is tearing apart something God joined together
 - Read Matt. 19:3-6
 - It's not just a simple matter of getting a divorce and signing papers. It's ripping apart one flesh that God joined together.
- The couple made a promise
 - Breaking the marriage means breaking vows the couple made to each other before God and other people.
- The effects of divorce are hard for the husband, wife, and the whole family.
- Marriage is an example of the relationship between Jesus and His Church, and when people divorce, they wreck that picture.

4. Stats of non-Christian and Christian divorce:

Ask: What percentage of marriages do you think end in divorce?

Explain:

- As of a few years ago, about 50% of marriages end in divorce.
- And there wasn't a big difference between Christians and non-Christians.
- 50% is a huge problem!

5. Marriage

Share these main points (in your own words, if helpful):

- God designed marriage for friendship/partnership (Adam and Eve in Genesis), sexual intimacy (Song of Solomon), producing children, and for family.
 - These are major reasons people get married – and good ones.
 - But marriage isn't something to keep only when your expectations are met.
- It's is a commitment
 - Traditional vows say something like this: "I, so-and-so, take you, so-and-so, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live.
 - It's not just a commitment to each other when they feel in love. It's a commitment to love each other for life.
- Don't think it's going to be a fairy-tail – It can be hard work!

6. Closing:

- If you are hurting because of a divorce, ask for God's (and people's) help!
- When you marry, marry for life and keep your commitment!
- If your parents have divorced, God can forgive them if they repent and seek His forgiveness. The Bible says God is faithful and will forgive those who confess.

7. Closing Prayer

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