

Walking in the *Foot Prints* of Jesus

A Discipleship Journey



Sermon on the Mount Week 12 **Mending Broken Relationships** Matthew 5:31 - 32

Opening Prayer:

Falling In Love
Prayer of Pedro Arupe, S.J.

Nothing is more practical than finding God,
That is, falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
What seizes your imagination,
Will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,
What you will do with your evenings,
How you will spend your weekends, what you read,
Who you know, what breaks your heart,
And what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

Reflection

We come to the tricky and sensitive discussion of the Old Testament law around divorce. Here, the Pharisees and scribes, as you will soon see, took great liberties.

It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."
Matthew 5:31 - 32

In its original form, the word adultery is not mentioned relative to divorce. Anyone found guilty of committing adultery was stoned to death. The marriage had definitely come to an end, but by punishment of death rather than divorce.

During the time of Moses, women were regarded as little more than property. As property, men discarded, or “divorced”, their wives for almost any kind of frivolous and trivial reason. If he didn’t like his wife’s looks, one day he could declare that they were divorced. Moses added the requirement for a certificate of divorce as a way of bringing control to a situation that had not only become chaotic but was grossly unfair to the women and which led to untold suffering on the part of both the women and the children. The situation hadn’t changed much by Jesus’ time: men continued to hold all the power when it came to divorce with vulnerable women and children being cast aside for little or no reason.

Jesus approaches this situation in a much more compassionate manner. Jesus puts the focus back on the relationship. When a husband can divorce his wife for almost any reason, there is no need to explore and evaluate what is weakening his commitment; he is simply getting rid of what no longer pleases him. Jesus, however, asks us to pause and consider where the relationship broke down and challenges us to work to reconcile rather than throw the relationship away. The primary point of Jesus’ teaching on divorce is to bring back equality between men and women, to restore and reconcile the relationship rather than dissolve it.

As with the prior two weeks reflections, there is a broader application to Jesus’ command. Jesus emphasizes throughout His teaching the sacredness of our relationships with others. *No* relationship should be thrown away just because we disagree with, dislike, or are different from another. While Jesus certainly reinforces the special bond in marriage in the passages above, *all* people, not just spouses, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and we must pursue reconciliation before ending a relationship because of our own personal preferences.

Reflection Question: How do I approach relationships with people who have different viewpoints than I do? What can I do to restore these relationships as Jesus invites me to do?

Closing Prayer

Speak to Jesus about what is on your heart, then rest in silence for a few moments listening for His response.