

JESUS AND DIVORCE

Distribute **Bibles** and invite volunteers to read aloud Mark 10:2-16. Explain that Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce is controversial. The law referred to by the Pharisees assumes that husbands have the right to get a divorce provided they issued a "certificate of dismissal" that freed the wife to remarry. Jesus is less concerned with what is legal than he is with what God intended. By quoting from the creation stories in Genesis, he reestablishes God's original intention for marriage. The kingdom of God that Jesus brings calls for a return to the kind of relationships created before the fall, for acceptance of the Creator's will rather than the desire for a law necessitated by sin. Jesus' teaching about the relationship of the kingdom of God to the child focuses the disciples' attention on those qualities—humility, submission, honesty and openness—that are necessary in a healthy relationship to God and to each other.

Discuss:

- What do you learn about divorce in Jesus' statements in Mark 10?
- What further understanding do you gain from the background comments on the verses?
- To what extent do you agree with Jesus? disagree with Jesus?

GUEST SPEAKER

Invite a guest speaker to join your group for a discussion of divorce. Look for a speaker with experience working with struggling couples or those seeking divorce, for example, a marriage counselor. Before the speaker arrives, discuss possible questions with group members. Examples:

- What do you think causes divorce?
- What advice do you have for people before they get married to help minimize the chance of divorce later on?
- What questions do you ask people who are considering getting divorced?
- Describe divorce from your perspective.

In the meeting, let group members interview the guest.

DIVORCE BRAINSTORM

Invite group members to participate in an uncensored listing of the pros and cons of divorce. Post **two sheets of newsprint** on separate walls of your meeting space, one titled *Divorce Yes* and the other titled *Divorce No!* Make available **colored felt markers** and explain:

- On the one sheet of newsprint, list all the reasons you can think of why people *should* get divorced.
- On the other sheet of newsprint, list all the reasons you can think of why people *should not* get divorced.
- Before writing, read what other people have written so you don't duplicate their comments.
- There is no censorship here; whatever you think of feel about divorce you can write, whether it comes from your experience or something you've heard.

When the group is done, gather around each sheet in turn and evaluate what's written on them. Discuss:

- What do we think are the five best reasons for splitting?
- What do we think are the five best reasons for staying together?
- What do you think God would say about each of the top five reasons from each list?

DIVORCE COURT

Recruit volunteers for a divorce court roleplay: a judge, a divorcing couple, several children, child's teacher, best friends, etc. The more players you have, the more complicated the roleplay, a reflection of the complexity of both the marriage relationship and the process of divorce. Let the judge lead all the other players through an examination of the breakup, interviewing everyone who attends the "divorce hearing."

Sample Questions:

- Why are you getting divorced?
- What other options have you explored?
- How do you expect this divorce to affect your children? other family members? your church involvement? your relationship to friends?
- How do you intend to handle the practical issues of dividing property? finances? child-care?
- What testimony can your friends, family members, colleagues, etc., give about your relationship?

Conclude the roleplay and invite reflections on the practical issues that came up. Discuss:

- How permanent should marriage be? Why?
- Many states have "no-fault" divorce policies, which permit a couple to divorce without giving any more reason than "mutual incompatibility." Do you think such divorces should be allowed?
- How does divorce affect society? Should society involve itself in the success — of the marriage institution?