FAMILY MATTERS
Week 3: Handling the Pain of Divorce

This includes:
1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW
All of us have either dealt with divorce directly or indirectly. Divorce devastates families, and the impact can be felt through extended networks of family members and friends. The focus of this lesson is to help students learn how they might reflect Jesus to those caught up in the incredible pain caused by divorce—and how they can experience God’s strength if their families experience divorce.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
1. WHAT: God will help us as we experience the pain caused by divorce—whether it’s the divorce of our own parents or a divorce that affects one of our friends.
2. WHY: God wants us to find strength in him and our friends during difficult situations.
3. HOW: Students will discuss several truths—God will never leave us alone, God will give us strength, and God’s love is greater than our pain—and consider specific ways they can encourage and support friends who are experiencing the painful consequences of divorce.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE
Isaiah 43:1-2

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES
Psalm 147:3 and 1 Peter 5:7

TEACHING PREP
The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you’ll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your lesson.

Read Isaiah 43:1-2.

Life is filled with complications and painful moments in relationships. Divorce often comes as a shock to teenagers, but God is able to help us handle those trials and walk beside us during those difficult times—and we can be there to help friends who are experiencing these tough moments.

These two verses from Isaiah 43 remind us that no matter what happens to us, God will protect us. These words evoke other moments from Israel’s history when God protected and provided—such as the story of God parting the waters of the Red Sea or God protecting Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. The Bible is clear that God is our protector and won’t let us go through trials alone.

If they haven’t already, your students will experience troubles during the teenage years. This week’s lesson focuses on the challenge of divorce, which is common—even among families that attend church, unfortunately. Even if your students don’t come from broken
homes, they probably have family members who are divorced or friends whose parents are
divorced. This is NOT a lesson on the reasons God hates divorce, ways teenagers can help
parents reconcile, or other topics in that direction. Our goal is to give students some tools to
handle the pain of divorce—whether it directly affects their family or affects other families
they know.

If your parents are divorced—particularly if the divorce occurred during your childhood or
teenage years—consider talking about your own experiences, the emotions you felt, and
how you felt God’s presence in that dark, difficult season.

**Special notes for this series**
When you talk about family, ugly stuff can come to the surface. This is OK; that’s why we’re
talking about this topic in the safe setting of a small group. We’ve found that it’s best to
focus on solutions and individual responsibility rather than joining in when a student
complains about family members. While you may feel like you are building a bridge by
identifying or agreeing with a student, you may be working to break down the family if you
take sides or criticize parents or other family members.

**If a student’s family is in the midst of divorce:** Odds are, you have at least one student
whose parents are divorced. If a student’s family is in the middle of a divorce, this lesson
may not be the right lesson for them. Reading a Scripture about trusting God and having
the rest of the room say, “Hey, it’s easy—all you have to do is trust God” could be terrible.
Of course, no one would say that directly, but it might be easily “heard” by a teenager in
the midst of pain.

One option is to skip this lesson and do something else. Another option is to call the student
to let them know about the topic and give them the freedom to skip—or tell them that if
they do show up, they shouldn’t feel pressured to talk. If a student does choose to skip, try
to set up a time to meet one-on-one to check in and be present for them. These are just a
few options; talk to your youth pastor or small group coordinator to get more ideas.

Having a student go through intense pain is tough! God is with you and you’ll do a great job
walking with the teenager through this experience.
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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]
Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then
ASK:

- How do you typically handle tough, difficult situations?
- Is this different from the way that your friends or brothers or sisters deal with tough, difficult situations?
- What are some of the toughest situations teenagers deal with today?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Teenagers have a lot to balance: school, family, activities, church, friends—and when a difficulty like divorce is thrown into the mix, the emotional rollercoaster can become very intense. The good news is that God doesn’t walk away from us during these tough times in life, as we’ll discover in today’s lesson.

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you’d like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING POINTS
The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen here are (1) God will never leave you alone, (2) God will give you strength, and (3) God’s love is greater than your pain.

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it’s up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Isaiah 43:1-2 together as a group. Consider allowing one or more of the teenagers to read the text.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Today we are going to talk about how to handle difficulties in life—specifically, the difficulties that come from divorce. Let’s spend a few minutes talking about some verses in the Bible that can help our friends and us during a difficult experience like divorce.

1. God will never leave you alone

ASK:

- What are some of your fears—fears of things like spiders or heights or small spaces? Tell us about these fears—and when they’ve made life miserable or challenging.
- What are some fears a teenager might experience if his or her parents are getting divorced?
- How do people generally deal with these emotions?
- What are some ways a divorce might interrupt the normal flow of life for a teenager?
• Besides divorce, what situations in life can feel like drowning or being overwhelmed by deep, raging water?
• Besides divorce, what situations in life can feel like being surrounded by a huge fire?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Sometimes it’s hard to remember that God is with us always. We don’t “see” God in the same way we “see” our best friends or teammates or family members. But God will never leave us alone, even in the middle of a painful experience like divorce. If you have a friend going through this experience, remind them that God cares and loves them, even if it doesn’t feel like it right now. Ask God for peace and support through this tough time.

2. God will give you strength

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: The Bible is filled with such phrases as, “I will be with you,” “Have peace in me,” and “He heals the brokenhearted.” God loves you, will never leave you, and will walk with you through tough times. Your life won’t be free of problems just because you’re a follower of Jesus, but because of your friendship with Jesus, you can go to God at any time and tell him how you feel and ask him for help.

ASK:
• How do you think God gives us strength and supports us through our difficulties? Be as specific as you can.
• How might a follower of Jesus react differently to difficult situations compared to someone who doesn’t have a friendship with Jesus? What do Christians have to help them in the midst of trials?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: God provides strength in all kinds of ways. Sometimes it’s through a specific verse in the Bible. Sometimes it’s through a “sense” or “voice” inside of us offering comfort and reassurance. Sometimes it’s through a friend’s hug—or simply someone’s presence so we don’t feel abandoned or isolated. If you have a friend in need of God’s strength, you can be part of God’s plan for comforting your friend. And if you’re the person who needs strength, turn to your friends for prayer and support.

3. God’s love is greater than your pain

ASK:
• How have you experienced and seen God’s love in your life?
• What are some unhealthy ways teenagers try to deal with their pain?
• What might be some better, healthier ways to deal with pain?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: We have a limited perspective, but God sees everything. Although pain is devastating, God is working. In his love, God is working to comfort us and draw us closer to him. God does not cause the pain we experience in life; pain is a consequence of sin in our world. God’s answer to pain is love. God can handle your frustration, anger, anxiety, loneliness, fear, and every other emotion that you experience when going through a tough time, whether it’s divorce or any other painful experience in life. God wants you to talk to him, tell him how you feel, and ask for help—help from God and help from people who care about you.
ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [optional]

ASK:
- Tell us about a recent example of how God helped you get through a difficulty.
- What would your life be like if you never asked God for help with anything and you tried to take care of every situation on your own?
- People will always let you down, but God will never let you down. How can this perspective shape your understanding of your friendship with God?
- Read Psalm 147:3. What are some specific ways God might use friends, trusted adults, and family members to heal pain, hurts, and wounds in your life?
- Read 1 Peter 5:7. What does it mean to give God all your worries or to cast your cares on him? How can we do this?

APPLICATION

Ask each student to find a partner for these questions.

ASK:
- What’s a tough situation you’re experiencing right now—or have recently experienced? How can you turn to God for strength and support and help during this time?
- What are the results of living with constant fear, worry, anxiety, and anger? What does God want you to do with these emotions?
- If you have a friend whose parents are getting divorced, how can you offer encouragement and support? What are some real-life ideas for being there for a friend?

Bring your students back together, and read aloud Psalm 23. Consider using either the New Living Translation or The Message to capture the real-world, God-with-us truths of this biblical passage. Read the verses slowly, allowing your students to visualize God’s presence with them in the middle of tough, difficult times—whether it’s their parents’ divorce or any other rough experience in life.

SUMMARY

End your small group lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you (1 Peter 5:7).