

## IRVING BIBLE CHURCH'S MARRIAGE GUIDELINES

*As pastors, one of our greatest privileges is to officiate at wedding ceremonies. To us, this is not only a privilege, but also a responsibility. We believe that our job is not merely to perform weddings, but to help couples build solid marriages.*

*Over the years, we've discovered five basic elements that greatly strengthen the foundations of any marriage relationship. We've also learned that for us, the wisest course of action is to excuse ourselves from officiating when any of these elements is missing:*

1. *Adequate preparation:* Marriage is a complex relationship meriting careful preparation. A couple needs to understand what marriage is, what it demands, and what changes and sacrifices it will require. Decisions need to be made as to core values and goals and concerning such key issues as childbearing / rearing and financial policies. Preferably, preparing for marriage involves a thorough program of premarital counseling spread out over several-months' period of time. At Irving Bible Church we require at least four months advance notice prior to the date of the wedding, this will allow a couple to demonstrate maturity and readiness in the above areas. A couple may reserve the building and schedule a pastor to perform the ceremony with the understanding that the arrangements are contingent upon the completion of the counseling sessions.
2. *Parental / family approval:* Marriage unites not just individuals, but also families. Much grief can be avoided if careful steps are taken to gain the extended family's approval of a marriage. Exceptions can be made upon evaluating the motives of dissenting parents / family members and their reasons for resisting the marriage (c.f. Ex. 20:12; Prov. 6:20; 23:22; 30:17).
3. *Spiritual harmony, moral purity:* Marriage is based on shared spiritual and moral values. Thus, if one person is a believer in Jesus Christ and draws their spiritual center from His word, it is vital that his or her mate also be a believer in Jesus Christ with a similar spiritual orientation (2 Cor. 6:14-18). Also, since Christian marriage is based on biblical morality, ongoing cohabitation or sexual involvement before marriage constitutes a violation of God's standards of moral purity. It is vital that a Christian couple keep themselves sexually pure as a firm foundation for a lasting relationship in marriage (Acts 15:29; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 13:4).
4. *Overall compatibility:* Issues such as personality / temperament, age, background, race, values, and maturity level become factors from case to case in determining overall compatibility. This is a subjective judgment, but our consciences demand that we use all the wisdom and insight at our disposal to discern the feasibility of a given marriage and to be allowed to decline participation if we feel a major incompatibility exists.
5. *Permissible grounds:* Scripture is very clear about God's plan for the permanence of marriage (Matt. 19; Mark 10) and His heartbreak when divorce occurs. God hates divorce for what it does to people and for what it does to the glory of His own covenant with the church. Nevertheless, we are painfully aware that divorce can and does occur in the lives of some believers under various circumstances. The topic of divorce and remarriage has been a personal, difficult, and much-debated issue throughout the history of the church, but we believe that we are all called to live according to our understanding of the will of God as expressed in Scripture. The church, as a spiritual family with commitment to honoring Christ and showing earnest love for each other, should be ready to minister forgiveness, healing, reproof, correction and restoration whenever appropriate. Those commitments are the basis for the attached guidelines which are given to reflect our understanding regarding questions of divorce and remarriage.

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## Guidelines for dealing with Divorce and Remarriage at Irving Bible Church

- A. Divorce:** Divorce is always the last option for believers. Because God hates divorce and can do miracles when people persevere, we should encourage believers to persevere in the resolution of marital difficulties and strife regardless of the cause or issues. No one should initiate a divorce unless their partner is guilty of repeatedly breaking the marriage covenant and is unrepentant and unwilling to submit to local church authority. Nonetheless, there are certain circumstances under which Scripture outlines permissible grounds for divorce as noted below:
- When a spouse is involved in ongoing, unrepentant marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:9)
  - When a spouse deserts or divorces their partner thus evidencing a disregard for God's desire for permanency in marriage and will not be reconciled. (Genesis 2:23-24, I Corinthians 7:15)
  - When a spouse is unwilling to fulfill essential marriage covenant commitments such as food, clothing, and/or conjugal love, which we understand to include the endangerment of the spouse or children. (Exodus 21:7-11)
- While not explicitly stated, we believe that abusive situations are covered by the Scripture cited because physical and emotional abuses are extreme forms of neglecting material support and physical affection. Again, one time or even repeated offenses should not be considered grounds for divorce unless the offending party is unrepentant and unwilling to submit to church authority. If the offending party is repentant and willing to truly submit to the direction of his elders a course of reconciliation and restoration should be pursued.

**While divorce may be *permitted* in the circumstances noted above, Scripture does *not command* divorce for believers.**

**B. Reconciliation:** The process of reconciliation includes genuine repentance and forgiveness. Reconciliation is the highest practical witness of divine grace and forgiveness. No sin or offence should be considered unforgivable and irreconcilable. Couples should be encouraged and in most cases required to seek reconciliation through repentance and forgiveness before entertaining the thoughts of divorce. Genuine Repentance would be characterized by:

- A willingness to submit to authority outside of oneself to receive direction and necessary steps toward real change
- A true sorrow over sins committed and a desire to turn away from those sins
- A yielding to God and His Word regarding the recognition, assessment, and confession of any sins committed
- A desire to be reconciled with the person against whom the sins were committed and those who may have been affected (children in most cases).

It is important to note that often the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Repentance is often the result of a process of moving toward God and His Word. Assessing whether a person is moving toward true Godly repentance or is simply dealing with worldly sorrow requires discernment and much prayer. A complete cessation of a particular sin or the lack thereof, while the goal, cannot be the benchmark of true repentance. As Jesus indicated, a brother may sin against a brother 7 times in the same day and truly repent. The repeated repentance may be an indicator that no change has truly occurred but it can also mean that a true battle over the flesh is in place. While forgiveness may be granted once, the move toward reconciliation is a process that may take some time as healing takes place and trust rebuilt. A committee for reconciliation should follow-up in order to encourage and accompany the reconciled couple in this journey towards healing and reconciliation.

**C. Remarriage:** While remarriage should never be entered into lightly, we feel that Scripture outlines certain grounds for remarriage as set forth below:

- Death breaks the marriage bond so remarriage is permissible without question for a believing widow or widower. (Romans 7:2-3; I Corinthians 7:39)
- If the previous marriage and divorce occurred prior to a saving belief in Christ. ( II Corinthians 5:17)
- If the previous marriage ended in divorce due to the reasons noted in Section 1 above.
- The marriage of the spouse who initiated the divorce may be viewed as severing the former marriage so that the unmarried spouse whose behavior did not biblically justify being divorced, may be free to remarry a believer. (Matthew 19:9)

Before any remarriage occurs, the following steps should be taken:

- Serious efforts should be made at reconciliation, including the involvement of the church, if necessary. Both parties must be encouraged to be reconciled to God and to their spouses (I Corinthians 7:11).
- An assessment should be made as to whether sufficient steps have been taken to ensure there has been healing from any destructive behaviors or attitudes and confession and repentance from any wrongs that may have contributed to the divorce.

**D. General:** The following guidelines should also be taken into consideration in matters involving divorce and remarriage:

- Generally, those couples who present themselves for remarriage by an IBC pastor or who wish to be married at IBC should meet the criteria set forth in these guidelines.
- However, if an IBC pastor is asked to remarry a couple who do not meet these criteria the following steps should be taken:
  - 1.) The pastor and the couple should examine together all of the relevant scriptures dealing with divorce and remarriage.
  - 2.) If, after prayerful consideration of these things, both the couple and the pastor involved believe that they can go forward without violating their conscience before God, they should seek the counsel of designated IBC leadership. If, after receiving such counsel, there is still a feeling that an exception is warranted; the pastor involved should come to the Elder Board for discussion of the specific basis for the exception.
  - 3.) Every effort should be made to try to discern the probability of success in the new marriage.
  - 4.) Careful consideration should be given to whether or not the couple are walking with Christ and seeking to serve Him.

**E. Pre-Marital Counseling for those who do not meet the criteria and who will not be married by an IBC pastor:**

- If a couple decides to go forward with their plans for marriage anyway, we should still offer to provide pre-marital counseling. It should be our objective to maintain a loving relationship with them so we can continue to lead them to a deeper walk with Christ.

*We congratulate you upon the significant step you are about to take in marriage. Thank you for your consideration of the above points. Please remember that these reflect our church's view, and are not intended to be critical of marriages, which, on their basis, we would decline to perform. All of us are responsible to live by our conscience to the best of our ability. Thanks for your understanding in allowing us that freedom.*  
*The Pastoral Staff of Irving Bible Church*